

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY



A Bachelor in the Making

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The Lost Weekend

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Pretty Boy

I DON'T know what happened. I'm high on a bottle of wine and heading for the Pelican's territory. I'm going to blast the first I see.

I never got there. I ran into Sadie. I snatched that witch and right off she asks me if I'm high again, like she don't know.

I'm gone already. Me and her went up on the roof. I want some more, I tell her. Since it's me she don't care, she says. But up on the roof she gives me the line. I bang her across the face and she has to give.

Next day I'm at her house. The crowd came and we put on records and danced, then cut out to the show.

That's where I met Zelma. I make Sadie introduce me, and Zelma says, "So you're Pretty Boy I heard so much about. You're mighty slim to raise all that hell gang fighting."

I smiled and felt proud. Sadie's mad. I let her go and ask Zelma who she go with.

Man, it was the most. I was flying high — until I did that crazy thing . . .



BY
HAL ELLSON

"Nobody," she says.

"Who you planning on going with?"

"I got somebody in mind right now," she says, watching me slyly.

"But it can't be me," I say, "cause I just met you."

"Yes, it's you, but what about Sadie?"

"Don't worry about her."

"If I ask you, would you go with me?"

"You go with me to the show next Sunday and I'll tell you."

Next Sunday I hit the show, went upstairs and saw her with one of the other cats. If he was one of the Pelicans he'd be dead in his seat. It was one of my own boys. I sat down in front of her. When that other cat went for a drink, I turned and said, "Dig, girl, what you sitting with him for?"

"He made me, I didn't want to," she says.

"Yeah, he can't make you do nothing. Do you or don't you want to go with me?"

"Yeah, Pretty Boy."

"Then get up and let's sit over there."

After the stage show, I took her out and she went home. Back in my own neighborhood, one of my boys comes up and says, "Did you know Zelma's coming down here tonight?" I didn't but I was waiting for her at the subway that evening. When she came up the steps, I asked what she was doing around.

"Coming to see you," she says.

"You're a damned liar, cause you wasn't. You was coming to see Teddy."

"I was coming to see you. Don't you believe me?"

I didn't, but I tell her, "Let's go for a walk."

We went to a little place they call a park. Nothing there but a blade of grass, a rock, a tree, a bench, and one light. "Baby," I say, "It's too light here for what I want."

She gave me a funny look, then said, "There's a whole field of grass behind us."

Next day she had on a ring from the Five and Ten. She showed it to the girls, saying me and her is engaged. One of the witches asked me about it and that's when I went looking for Zelma's skin. I found her with some of her friends and right off I say, "What's the idea of telling these dogs I gave you a ring?" Damn, she looked ready to cry, and me, I don't want her to feel bad so I turn to the others. "Yeah, I gave her the ring. What about it?" I said to them.

One girl laughed. "Pretty Boy, you're sweet but you're evil," she tells me.

That night I bought me some reefers. I got crazy high quick and sent Zelma home for my pistol. Then I picked up the rest of the boys, cause we got a "war" on with the Pelicans. We taxied into foreign

territory, fired a few wild shots and flew, cause the cops was hot in the streets.

By that time I'm so high they have to drag me from the taxi. I was real goofed and when Zelma met me, she was half goofed and didn't care where we went, so we went up on her roof.

"I don't care what happens," she said. "I hope you can't ever quit me. I'm going to buy you a coat."

"Baby, you love me, steal me some good shirts, I'm partial to blue," I tell her.

"I'll steal a box of them for you, all with pearly buttons, as long as you love me."

"Yeah, baby, you're the only one I ever did love. If I went to jail, what would you do?"

"I'd wait for you."

I felt in my pockets for money. "I want some more Pete and reefers," I tell her. "You get the stuff cause I'm shy of the streets tonight."

Yeah, she bought the wine and reefers for me and we got high.

Late the next afternoon, I went to the poolroom. "Hey Joe, let me go with a couple of sticks," I said to the man.

"Ain't got them with me. I'll be back in ten minutes," he says, and I waited.

Good stuff he brought back. "I got fifty more, if you want to push them for me," he tells me.

"Yeah, what's the profits, man?" I asked.

"Same as always," he says. "But

dig, man, don't try to cheat me cause I got everything counted. I don't want to cut you, but I'll do it if I have to. You got money and sticks for yourself. If the cops bust you, I won't be there but somebody'll be there for you."

"Okay, Joe."

"Keep a cool head, and don't talk or you'll have us all in the slam. See you later, kid."

A dance was set for the next night. I'm thinking of the Pelicans, if they'll be there. I hate them punks. Going to get one yet.

I listened to some blues and boogie. Then I took me a bath, dressed, chipped in for a bottle of Five Star and got a little high. We was ready for the dance by that time and somebody called a taxi. When we got to the Hall we swaggered in. Damn, them girls was drunk and dizzy with wine and reefers already.

Pelicans there, too. One of their punks stepped on my shine while I'm dancing. "What you doing?" I say to him.

"Mother-jumper, I'll step on your throat next. I'll bang your head and rock your foundations."

"Ycah, maybe you want a pistol butt for a self-raising eye," I said, moving my hand inside my jacket.

That ended it. Boys from both sides broke it up, but there was a bad feeling the rest of the evening. Me, I played the field, looking for

trouble. We was all looking for trouble. I wandered up to the balcony and made a pass at a man's wife. The man showed me a knife.

I took a fast walk and found one of my boys and a girl sitting out a slow-drag. They was chewing benzedrine. Me, I don't chew today to get drunk tomorrow. Benny don't make you high, it makes you lazy. That's what I told them.

The girl laughed and I didn't like that, so I walked. Another like her once tried to grandstand on me. I could hear her voice in my head yet, saying, "You ain't going to do this, and you ain't going to do that." I told her, I don't want no girl giving me orders. "You jiving turkey, I don't want no man I can beat," she said. "I want a man and therefore you ain't nothing but a flunkie." That was when I swung and knocked her down the stairs.

The dance was over at two and I'm all reefed up. Got evil thoughts about them Pelicans. One of them is going to die yet.

Me and my boys stood across the street from the Hall with the girls. The Pelicans stood out front. One of their girls threw a can of lye and started the rumble. I'm thinking of my face, so I got under a truck when that lye flew. That fight didn't last. Somebody yelled cops and we scattered.

Me, I hustled over to Fat-Stuff's. We all met there and ate fish sandwiches. Coming out, I see a squad car at the curb. Two cops got out

and lined us up against the windows. Me and my boys all had blue club hats on.

"What's all the blue hats for?" one of them cops says, and nobody answered till he picked me out.

"My hat matches my blue wrap and blue suedes," I tell the flatfoot, and he turned to Big Jim.

"What's your blue hat for?" he asked.

Big Jim had an answer. Everybody did.

The cop swung back to me. "Where'd you come from?" he asked.

"My girl's house," I say. Big Jim tells him the same.

"Next guy tells me that, I'll beat him till he bleeds from the nose. Next!"

"I was at my girl's house," Conky said.

That cop looked disgusted. His eyes moved to Little Jim. "You," he said, but knew what the answer would be and bashed him. "I'd kill my own mother if she told a lie like that," the cop said. "Next one that does, I'll cripple him for life."

"What are we supposed to have done?" I asked.

"You guys were fighting outside the Hall, that's what."

"How do you know it was us?"

"Cause I can smell rats a mile away. Now get the hell out of here!"

He swung on me. A bad cop with a big fist. Yeah, but I set my hat

back straight, wiped blood from my lips with my yellow handkerchief. "If it wasn't for the women, we wouldn't be in that. I wouldn't have got that poke," I said.

"Yeah, they're all pepperheads. That Rosie is a tough one," Little Jim said. "Throwing that lye. I want this handsome face yet."

Conky nodded. "A mad witch, that one. Real mad."

By three o'clock we was scattered, home. The streets was quiet, but soon as I hit the bed and close my eyes I hear a siren. A squad car running wild. I followed the sound with my eyes closed.

Then dreamed I was smoking a reefer in Zelma's house, dreamed she had gobs of them, and a bottle of gin. I had another dream. Two of them and nothing more.

Morning I got up and hung around the house, playing records. No pep, nothing inside me till I read the invitation that came in the mail. It was brief. "You're invited to a party. There'll be lots of fun." That meant only one thing, a pot party.

I came with a bottle of wine, even if it was a pot party. Somebody eyed me through the peephole and said, "Show your invitation, brother."

"Punk, open them portals or I'll kick them down," I said and the door opened.

"Why it's Jesse James himself!" a girl screamed when I came in.

And there was Conky. He looked

worried. "Where's your girl? You ain't getting mine," he says.

I shove him aside. "All the women in the world is mine," I said, looking around.

A dim light in the room, shades down, reefers on the table, music, a slow-drag, the *Orioles* singing *A Kiss and a Rose*. Couples sitting, the keyhole jammed, weather-stripping at the door cracks, windows closed; that room stunk to hell.

A girl passed me a bomber and said, "This is a high party, handsome man."

"Dreamboat, light it for me with your torch," I say. Smoke sucked deep in my lungs. "Yeah, now let's dance a little, baby."

Others began to dance; some were digging the record and kissing.

"Damn, fifty characters'll be laying around dead in the morning," I told the girl.

"I'm high already, Pretty Boy."

"How you know my name? You don't know me."

"Everybody knows you."

"Witch, you is high. If the Law comes, you better go through the window or you'll be in jail. What's in the kitchen? I heard a noise."

"There ain't no blue light in the kitchen."

I broke away, went in the kitchen. A game of dice, much money on the floor. I went back to the room with dim blue light. Big Jim walked in.

"Dig that trenchcoat!" somebody said from a dark corner. "That

boy'd kill his uncle for a slice of ham."

And there was Zelma.

I grabbed her wrist. "Where you been?"

"In the little girl's room. I been waiting for you. I'm high, let's sit. Ain't that music crazy?"

"Yeah. A cool party too," I said, reaching for another stick.

We sat down away from the blue light. "Darling, I'm so high I could marry you right now," Zelma said. "These reefers are so good."

"Baby, you're goofed. You're talking a hole in my head."

"I don't care, I'm loving you. Anything you say goes. Anything you want you can have."

"Yeah," I said, and my mind was in a different world. Kissing Zelma, I remembered my first reefer. Like I'm on another planet. Nobody alive but myself. My mouth dry. A crazy idea like I could tear a man apart with my bare hands. That was the night I ran into the Pelicans and got a pistol butt on the head. I think of that and get mad again. Got to fix that up.

"Kiss me, I love you," I hear Zelma say and before I know it, it's two o'clock. Others are cruising in and out. Across the room I see another cat spread a handkerchief and break a capsule. Cocaine. Somebody going to be real goofed. I finished my sixth stick and Zelma's on me again, drowning me with her lips.

A new cat comes in. She sees him

and says, "That boy looks like Ace of the Pelicans."

Damned if he didn't. And I remember then. That Ace split my head with the gun butt.

I get up goofed, and walk out by myself. It's all crazy now. I'm Pretty Boy and I'm the strongest stud in the world. That boy Ace split my head. I'm going to split his head.

I walk downtown. Buildings look like they're dancing. The lights are all goofed up. Three guys standing on a corner. One looks like Ace. They all look like him. I walk up and start shooting.

When I wake up a cop is next to my bed and got my arm. "Come on, you punk!"

"What did I do, man?" I say to him.

"We know you shot someone. We're going to put you down for a long time."

"Shot who? You got to have some proof."

"We got it. Now dress and make it damned fast," the cop said, and they took me downtown in a squad car.

"Just give us the gun and we'll break it and tell nobody," they said in the office.

"I don't know nothing about it," I told them, and somebody almost knocked my head off. But I wouldn't talk till Zelma came.

"Pretty Boy, tell them and they'll stop torturing you," she begged.

That's when I broke. I told them

I was fooling around and the gun went off accidentally.

"You're a damned liar. We've got enough to hang you," they told me. Yeah, they took me to the station house and let me sleep it off in the cellar.

At seven somebody kicked me. The wagon was waiting outside. They took me away, put me in a chair, pinned a number on me. Yeah, I got mugged.

Upstairs I had to stand on a platform. "Look up into the lights," somebody said. They're blinding. I can barely see. I hear a voice say: "This is Joseph Nagel, alias Pretty Boy."

I was scared, but I thought, I'm a big-timer now.

After that, they took me in a car back to the alley where I told them I threw the pistol. They didn't find it. Handcuffs on, they brought me back to my house and people stared. I felt ashamed cause of my mother. No pistol in the house, so they took me back. Next, I met the judge. Everything was crazy. I didn't hear nothing at all till he says, "Bee Street Jail."

I was still handcuffed when they put me in the wagon. I hear the others talking. A wife-beater, a pickpocket, a bum. Listening to them men, I felt like a bigshot. Yeah, I shot a man, I told myself.

In the jail a guard stopped by my cell. "I don't want no hollering and no throwing water out," he warned, "or I'll give you the hose."

I wanted to spit in his face. I didn't. I turned away. Solid walls on both sides. Bars in back. I got a sick kind of feeling. Then I hear a voice: "Hey, number eight, what are you here for?"

Number eight is me, my cell. I turned to the little opening in the door. "None of your business," I yelled. Then I hit the mattress but I can't sleep. The damned stoolies are talking up above.

Next morning at five a guard rapped the bars with his keys. "Get up, you punk! If you don't, you ain't going to eat."

Later he comes back. "So you're Pretty Boy," he says.

"Yeah."

"Well, you may be pretty to the girls and baby to your mother, but you're only another rat to me. Now get that sandsoap and rag and wash them walls down!"

The cell door slammed, footsteps went down the corridor. I looked across at the other cell, at a guy with a face like Christ's.

"My name's Isky. What's yours?" he says.

I tell him and ask him what they got him on.

"I like to make fires and watch the flames."

Yeah, that guy was gone. He set the fire and told the cops he did it.

Later, I was reading the Thirty-Seventh Psalm when I hear steps in the corridor again. My eyes ran over the words. . . . "For evildoers

shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." And them footsteps grew louder till the words meant nothing. The guard opened the cell of a prisoner who bought from the commissary man and didn't pay. I listened. Everybody did till the guard was finished and the cell door slammed shut again. Then somebody said, "He beat a hundred dollars worth of milk and sandwiches out of that poor guy."

Everyone laughed but the man in number six.

We went for exercise in the yard. Me, I didn't want none. I looked around the yard, then up at the tower where the guard was watching. "Hey, Bunko," I said, "I got to write me a letter. You got a pencil?"

Bunko handed me a bitten stub. "Who you going to write?" he asked.

"My best pal," I told him. Then I wrote the letter and handed it to him.

Say, Tiger, what's happening around outside? Who you going with now? Tell all the girls I said hello. Tell Cora when I come out I want

some stuff. I heard the Law came around again looking for Dopey. When I come out, I want to get high. I'm going straight, straight to a stick of charge. I want Belle's skin when I come out. Yeah, I'm going to bop harder than ever. Going to shoot me another cat first day out of here. Detective Jameson told the judge I shot that man on purpose. Tell Zelma I'm going to hang her from a beam when I get out.

From Pretty Boy, the great P.S. Tell Moms hello and don't worry.

Bunko read it out loud and passed it back. "You can't send this stuff out," he said. "They're going to read it and beat you blue-black."

So I tore it to pieces. "Got no stamp anyhow," I told him. "The hell with it, the hell with everybody. I got a feeling I'm not going home for a long, long time cause I shot a man."

A whistle sounded and I looked at the grey walls and the guard in the tower. "Wish I had wings," I said.

"Wish I had a tommy-gun and I'd blast that no-good turkey off his roost."

"Yeah," said Bunko, sad-faced. "I only knifed a man. I wonder when I get out?"



BY FLETCHER FLORA

I SHOULDN'T have done it to Obie. I keep telling myself that he's really better off, that he might have come to even a worse end if it hadn't happened the way it did, but I know that isn't true. I know I played a dirty trick on the only guy who ever really loved me, and I know I'll remember it as long as I live and think about it the last thing before I die. I keep thinking about how he loved to work in the fields under the hot sun with the sweat seeping through his rough blue shirt in a great dark stain until the whole shirt was sopping wet, and about how he used to take a dip afterward in the deep pool at the bend of the creek and then



Two Little Hands

Obie was everybody's friend, because Obie was too dumb to get mad. Then Obie was forced into action . . .

sit naked on the bank like a small, innocent boy and watch the shifting pattern of sunlight and shade and listen to the stirrings and splashings of small life along the bank and in the water. You can't do things like that where Obie is now. Not in a mad house.

He isn't really crazy, no matter what they said. It's just that he isn't bright. I don't know much about the technical gradations of intelligence, but I guess you'd call Obie an imbecile, maybe. He was a good worker, but you always had to tell him exactly what to do. You'd tell him to get the ax, he'd get the ax. You'd tell him to chop some wood, he'd chop some wood. Then, unless you'd tell him to put the ax away, he'd leave it right out in the God-damn rain or anything else. The only time he ever went ahead and did something on his own, without being told just what, was the time I'm telling about, the time I played the dirty trick on him. It got pretty trying sometimes, telling him just every little thing to do that way, and I lost my temper and cursed him more times than I can count, but I regret it now, and wish I hadn't done it, and most of all I wish I hadn't done what I did in the end to get him put away. I miss Obie. It's lonely around here without him.

It happened the day I heard him singing *Two Little Hands* out behind the barn. *Two Little Hands* is a religious song, a kind of hymn, I

guess, and it's all about someone having two little hands for Jesus, and it's supposed to be sung by kids in Sunday School and places like that. Someone had got hold of Obie early and taught him a few simple things about religion, and he was always singing this little song that he'd picked up somewhere. He only knew a few lines, because that was all he was capable of remembering, but he liked to sing what he knew, and he sang it every time he thought to, or someone asked him to, and it was sort of funny and sad at the same time to hear the big lug do it, especially because his hands were really about the size of a brace of snow scoops.

I heard him singing this song behind the barn, and then I heard someone start to laugh as if it was the funniest God-damn thing that ever happened. There were two voices laughing, that is, a man's and a woman's, and I knew it was Ivy and Gunner Hoke back there with Obie. I began to feel sick then, partly because I didn't like anyone poking fun at Obie, but mostly because it was Ivy and Gunner doing it. Ivy was my step-sister, no blood relation, and Gunner was a tall lean guy from in town who came out to see her. He was doing more than seeing her, too. I knew that as well as anything, even though I couldn't actually prove it, and for a long time I kidded myself that I hated Gunner for that reason, because I didn't approve

of such goings-on, but now that I'm making a clean breast of everything and telling the whole story, I may as well admit that it was really because I wanted to take Ivy for myself and never could.

She was enough to make anyone want to. Gunner and I weren't the only ones by any means, and so far as I know maybe Gunner wasn't the only one who managed it. She did everything she could to put it in a guy's mind, that was sure. She was certain to be sloppy fat someday, like her old lady, my step-mother, but now her body was just full and ready, like it had been tree-ripened in the hot summer sun for picking, and it had a way of projecting itself through the thin cottons she wore around the place. She knew the effect she had on me, all right, I wasn't fooling her any, and she got a hell of a bang out of it even though she never intended to give me any house. I guess I hated her in a way just as much as I hated Gunner, but I'm trying to be honest, and I can't be sure, because it was all mixed up with my wanting her the way I did.

I went around behind the barn, and there was Obie singing this little song about two little hands for Jesus, and he was standing like a kid speaking a piece for the parents on the last day of school, with his big feet together in the dust and his huge, bony hands hanging down at his sides below knobby wrists that looked like they'd been swollen

and crippled by arthritis. He had a pained look on his face, just like he always got when he sang, his pale eyes staring straight in front of him and filled with a kind of misery, as if it hurt him to try to remember the words in the order they were supposed to come. Tears were rolling down his cheeks, and his slack mouth that was never quite closed, even when he wasn't talking or singing, leaked saliva at the corners, and the saliva ran down over his chin. He was a big, lank guy at least three inches over six feet, and his bones were thick and knobby at all the joints just like at the wrists, and he looked like just what he was, a big boob without the brains to know when someone was making a damn fool of him, but I didn't think it was funny.

Ivy and Gunner did, though. They were leaning against the barn with their arms around each other, and they were laughing fit to kill, Ivy with an abandon that was almost hysteria and Gunner more quietly, in his own way, his bright red lips drawn back off white teeth in an expression that was somehow canine and cruel.

I went over and grabbed Obie by an arm and jerked him around. His song ended with a little squawk in his throat, and he stood looking down at me with his mouth hanging open and his pale eyes clouded and confused in the way they got when anything happened too suddenly or was a little different from any-

thing that had happened to him before.

"What'd you do that for, Jake?" he said. "I was singing my song for Ivy. You oughtn't to stop me when I'm singing my song for Ivy."

"God damn it," I said, "can't you tell when someone's making a damn clown out of you? Haven't you even got that much brains?"

He shook his head slowly from side to side, laboring to understand what I'd said, taking each word one at a time in the darkness of his brain and figuring it and then putting them all together at the end like a little kid just learning to read.

"You oughtn't to say that, Jake. Ivy's my girl. You know Ivy's my girl. Ivy wouldn't do anything like that to Obie."

"Don't be any more of a fool than God intended you to be, Obie. Ivy's just stringing you along. She's Gunner's girl, not yours. Why would she laugh at you if she wasn't? Why would she stand there laughing at you and letting Gunner laugh with her right in front of you if she wasn't?"

It was true that Ivy teased Obie. She was cruel by instinct, and it gave her a big bang to work him up to the point where he was leaking saliva through his loose lips and shaking like a bird dog evacuating peach seeds, and you'd have thought it was a dangerous game for her, that a big powerful guy with no brains to evaluate consequences might have just slapped her down

and had what he wanted, but she knew it wouldn't happen because Obie had this simple religion in him and a rudimentary kind of morality that had been drilled into him for his own protection that said you never bothered anyone, least of all a woman, and that any kind of physical intimacy, no matter how bad you wanted it, was evil and strictly taboo. He'd never have touched Ivy, or Gunner, either, if it hadn't been for me. Never on earth.

He swung his head around and looked at Ivy and Gunner by the barn. "Gunner oughtn't to do that to Ivy. Ivy doesn't like it. Ivy wouldn't even like Obie to do something like that."

Gunner let his hand slip off her and stepped forward, bending a little at the waist like a man ready to attack. He was looking at me, not Obie, and his eyes were as black and shiny as two chips of anthracite, and his face, though he had quit laughing, had the same expression as before, his red lips drawn back in the shape of cruel pleasure without sound. Ivy, in an unconscious gesture, lifted her hands to her armpits and ran them down the sidelines of her body as if she enjoyed the feel of herself.

She said softly, "Don't pay any attention to Jake, Obie. He's just jealous. He's jealous because I'm your girl instead of his."

Obie shook his head again, his sparse dry hair falling down over

his eyes. "No. Jake's Obie's friend. Jake's Obie's friend, and Ivy's Obie's girl."

It was as simple as that to the big boob. He couldn't see any conflict. He couldn't see any reason at all why it shouldn't be that way.

Gunner laughed with a sound that was no more than a long breath hissing through his teeth. "Jake's a sneaky little mouse, that's what he is. Jake's a slimy, panting little jerk who can't get what he wants and doesn't want anyone else to get it."

My hate was too big for me then, and I stepped forward and started to swing at him, but he was much too fast for me and hit me flush in the mouth, and I was suddenly on my back in the hot, dry dust with blood in my throat. After fifteen seconds or so, I got up to do the best I could, but it wasn't necessary, because Obie was standing between me and Gunner, and his huge hands were clenching and unclenching slowly.

"Don't hit Jake again," he said to Gunner. "Don't hit Jake and don't touch Ivy."

Gunner was lean and mean and fast as hell, but he didn't want any part of Obie. Obie would simply have waded into him and taken him in his big hands and crushed the life out of him, and Gunner knew it. In his eyes were fear and sudden withdrawal, but in Ivy's eyes there was nothing but the crazy, shining excitement that was always her

reaction to violence or the sight of blood as the symbol of violence.

"Come on, Obie," I said. "Let's cut out. I want you to help me down in the fields."

I took him by an arm and led him down the cowpath into the pasture at the lower end and across the pasture toward the creek, and all the way he kept turning his head every few steps to look back toward Ivy and Gunner by the barn, and I could tell he was trying to figure it out, what had happened and why I had stopped him from finishing his song and why we had all said and done the things we had. My lips were split and beginning to swell, and one tooth was so loose that I could push it around with my tongue, but that wasn't what hurt. A few cuts and bruises didn't matter a damn. What hurt was the festering hatred and humiliation inside me that made me want to vomit and was all the worse because I couldn't think of anything to do about it. At the edge of the timber along the creek I stopped and looked back myself, and I could see Ivy and Gunner walk across the barnyard and into the barn with their arms around each other, and I knew all of a sudden without any doubt at all just what they were going in there for. I think I knew because I understood that it would be necessary for Ivy to complete the cycle of intense physical excitement that the brief episode of violence and blood had aroused but hadn't satisfied.

"What we stopping for, Jake?" Obie said. "I thought we were going to the fields."

If he hadn't said that, maybe I wouldn't have done it. Maybe just a little thing like his saying something at the wrong time was the difference between doing it and not doing it.

"I just remembered that we'll need a pitch fork, Obie," I said. "Go back to the barn and get one."

"What we need a pitch fork for?"

"Never mind that. Just go get it. It's sticking in the hay in the loft."

He started back the way we had come, and when he'd gone a few steps, I said, "Wait a minute, Obie. Listen to me. You be real quiet going in the barn. Don't let anyone see you or hear you. You understand?"

His eyes got clouded and confused from the effort of trying to understand why I was telling him to get the fork in a way that was different from the way I had always told him to get it before.

"Why, Jake? Why don't you want anyone to see me?"

"Never mind. I've got my reason. Will you do it the way I say?"

"Sure, Jake. If you say so."

"Don't forget, now. Promise?"

"Sure, Jake. I promise."

He turned and started again, and I stood and watched him, watched his long, loping gait eat up the distance to Ivy and Gunner in the barn, and then I went on through the trees to the bank of the creek

and sat down. I gathered a handful of pebbles and threw them one at a time into the dark green water, watching the little concentric circles move outward from the place where the pebble went in, and then, after the water had smoothed out, I lay back on the bank and closed my eyes and began to count, and I had counted a long way, I don't remember how far except that it was a long way, when I heard Obie's big clod-hoppers thumping the ground, and he came through the trees and sat beside me. He was breathing very hard. His breath was like a whinny in his nostrils.

Without opening my eyes, I said, "You get the fork, Obie?"

"Fork?"

"What's the matter, Obie?"

He didn't answer, and I guess he didn't even hear me, but after a while he said more to himself than to me, "He oughtn't to have done it. She oughtn't to have let him."

I knew then that it was both of them. I knew that he had seen what I'd sent him to see and that he'd done what I'd thought he might do. I couldn't stand the sight of him sitting there crying, so I rolled over and buried my face in my arms, but I could still see him just the same, and I can still see him now, and I only wish they had, in the place where he is, a field where he could work under the hot sun with his big hands, and a creek where he could go when the work was finished.



The Red Tears

A Novelette

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

Mrs. Hallaby had heard a sound she was sure was a gunshot. It looked like just another timewaster—until the cops found the dead girl.

IT HAD BEEN one of the slowest mornings we'd had all summer. And one of the hottest. There were a couple of electric fans in the squad room, but they did little good. They kept the desk tops reasonably free of soot, and occasionally whipped a report across the room, and that was about all. It was Fred's and my morning to grab telephone squeals, but the phone hadn't rung once since eight A.M., when we'd come on duty. We'd put the

time to good use, though, catching up on odds and ends of paper work.

Fred rolled a form into his Underwood and mopped at the back of his neck with a handkerchief.

"I know why we haven't had any squeals this morning, Jake," he said. "It's just too damned hot. No self-respecting criminal would —"

And then, as if on cue, the phone did ring, and I grabbed it.

Fred grimaced. "Now watch that thing make a liar out of me."

"Sergeant Thomas," I said. "Eighteenth Squad."

"I want to speak to the commissioner!" It was a woman's voice, loud and very high-pitched, and obviously belonged to someone pretty well along in years. "Is this the commissioner's office?"

"No, ma'am," I told her. "You have the Eighteenth Precinct detective squad."

"But I asked that other man for the commissioner. I distinctly told him I wanted —"

I switched the phone to the other hand and fished for a cigarette. "The commissioner is kind of tied up," I said. "Maybe I can help you."

"Who was that other man — the one I talked to first?"

"That was the desk officer."

"Why didn't he connect me with the commissioner?"

"If you'll tell me what the trouble is, I'll be glad to —"

"Well! The trouble is that some-

one has just been killed in the next apartment. . . . Now will you connect me with the commissioner, young man, or shall I —"

I put the cigarette down on the edge of my desk and reached for a pencil. "How do you know someone's been killed?"

"Because I heard a shot over there, that's why. Now will you —"

"What's your name and address?" I asked.

"Hallaby. Mrs. Edward Creighton Hallaby."

"And the address, Mrs. Hallaby?"

"Nine-sixty-one West Fifty-fifth. Does that mean anything to you, young man?"

"We'll be right over," I said. "Nine-sixty-one."

"No, no! I'm not referring to the address. I mean the name. Does the name Edward Creighton Hallaby mean anything to you?"

"I'm afraid not," I said. "You're home now, I take it?"

"Yes. Indeed I am. And now I can understand why I wasn't routed directly to the commissioner. You must be very new to New York, young man, or the name Edward Creighton Hal —"

"We'll be right over," I said again, and hung up.

"What've we got?" Fred asked.

"Hard to say. Woman over on Fifty-fifth thinks she heard a shot in the next apartment."

"Thinks? You means she sounded like a crackpot?"

I nodded. "Well, let's check it

out, Fred." I lifted my jacket off the back of my chair and slipped it on, and then scrawled a message for the squad commander so he'd know where we were.

"Nothing like hot weather to bring out the crackpots," Fred said. "It never fails."

2.

Nine-sixty-one West Fifty-fifth was an eight-story apartment house on the north side of the street. There was a small foyer with a row of mailboxes along one side and two self-service elevators on the other. We looked at the names under the mailboxes until we found Mrs. Hallaby's apartment number, and then took one of the elevators up to the sixth floor.

Mrs. Hallaby opened the door at almost the same instant Fred pushed the buzzer. She was older than I'd guessed, somewhere between seventy and seventy-five, but she wore no glasses and her movements were quick and sure. She had alert blue eyes and a lot of white hair wound into a tight bun at the nape of her neck.

"I'm Sergeant Thomas, Mrs. Hallaby," I said. "This is Detective Spence."

She bobbed her head about an inch to each of us. "And the name Edward Creighton Hallaby — it still means nothing to you, I suppose?"

I shook my head. "Which apartment did the shot come from?"

She indicated the apartment to

the right of her own. There were only three apartment doors on this floor, Mrs. Hallaby's and the ones at either side of it. The other side of the hall had a row of windows opening on an air shaft.

"These apartments have back doors?" I asked.

"No, they don't. Why do you ask?"

"Because we'd want to cover both doors, if there was more than one."

"When'd you hear the shot?" Fred asked.

"Why, just a few seconds before I called. I dialed the operator and asked for the police, and she —"

"We'll be back to talk to you," I said. "Come on, Fred."

We walked down to the next apartment. Fred stood on one side of the door while I stood on the other. I knocked. There was no answer, and after a moment I knocked again.

"Police officers!" Fred yelled. "Open up!"

There wasn't a sound. I glanced at Fred and shrugged. "You're a better burglar than I am," I said. "See if you can make that lock."

He took a strip of celluloid from his billfold, inserted it in the crack between the door and the jamb, and moved it up and down until he located the tongue of the lock. Then he positioned the celluloid against the bevel of the tongue and pushed firmly, meanwhile twisting the knob with his other hand. The entire operation took, perhaps,

ten seconds, and then the bolt snapped back and the door swung inward.

The girl on the floor was very blonde and very young. She was fully clothed, but her white dress was torn at the neck and waist, and her hair was disheveled. A cocktail table had been overturned and a small hooked rug lay half on the table and half on the floor, as if kicked or thrown there.

I closed the door behind us and knelt down beside the girl. She had been shot in the neck, about three inches beneath the right ear. There was just the one bullet hole, and that, coupled with the angle of entrance, meant the slug was still inside her skull. There was almost no blood.

"Looks like she put up a pretty good fight," Fred said. He lifted one of the girl's hands and glanced at the fingernails. "She didn't get a chance to do any clawing, though."

I straightened up. "Better call the lieutenant and tell him we've got a homicide," I said. "I'll check the other rooms."

There was no one in the bedroom or bath or kitchen, and no evidence of any struggle. I got back to the living room just as Fred was hanging up the phone.

"The boys are on their way," he said. "You find anything?"

"Nope. Looks like all the action took place out here." And now I noticed something I hadn't seen when we first came in. On the

floor, hidden from the hall door by a large leather hassock, was a woman's purse. It was upside down, and open, and when I lifted it a lipstick rolled away across the carpet.

There were the usual feminine items, but no money and no wallet. There was only one piece of identification, an Actor's Equity Association card made out to Elizabeth Hanson. The apartment number and address indicated it had belonged to the dead girl.

"Any dough?" Fred asked.

I shook my head. "No wallet, no loose bills, no change, no anything."

"Kind of looks like somebody killed her, scooped whatever dough she had out of her purse, and took off," Fred said.

"It looks that way, all right," I said.

"Maybe this was one of our loid-workers," Fred said. "They've made a lot of hits in this neighborhood lately."

I closed the purse, put it on top of the hassock, and stared down at the girl again. Fred was probably right, I knew. "Loid-workers" are burglars who get inside an apartment with the aid of a strip of celluloid, exactly the way Fred had done. Most of them use pretty much the same M.O. Usually they'll step into an apartment house foyer, make a fast note of several names and apartment numbers, and then go down the street to a phone booth. They look up the telephone num-

bers for each name, and then call each one in turn until they find a phone that doesn't answer. They let it ring long enough to be certain no one is home; then they return to the apartment house, go to the apartment, and get to work with their celluloid. That's their only tool, the celluloid—if you don't count the gun they're sure to have. And use, if you're unlucky enough to walk in on them.

It's not at all uncommon for a long-time loid-worker to hit several apartments in the same building, one right after the other, spending no more than two or three minutes in each. They're after jewels and money, mostly, but if they come across something larger that they think is worth while, they'll look in the closet for a traveling bag and carry it out in that.

"Better look around a little, Fred," I said. "I'm going back and talk to Mrs. Hallaby."

"What was that bit she got off about somebody named Edward Creighton Hallaby?" Fred asked. "I never heard of the guy."

"That makes two of us," I said.

3.

Mrs. Hallaby had been peering out her hall door, but when I stepped into the hall she jerked her head back inside, and when I reached her apartment the door was shut. I knocked, and after about half a minute the door opened.

"Well?" Mrs. Hallaby said.

She didn't ask me inside, so I stepped in anyway. "You were right about the shot, Mrs. Hallaby," I said.

"Of course I was right!"

"Did you know the girl in the next apartment?"

"Know her? Well, I felt as if I knew her. I'd never actually met her, of course." She paused, and her eyes grew very bright. "Is she dead?"

"Yes."

She tried to look shocked and saddened at the same time, but she didn't do a very good job of it. I sensed that, mentally, she was licking her lips.

"It's the Lord's way," she said, shaking her head slowly. "I could have predicted it."

"That so?" I asked. "How?"

"Why, from the way she was carrying on. There wasn't a night she didn't have some man in there. Not a single night. Drinking, and playing that hideous jazz music, and Heaven knows what all. And the language she used! It was enough to singe your ears."

"Did I understand you to say you'd never met her, Mrs. Hallaby?"

"Well, not personally. I don't think I'd care to actually know such a person. As my dear husband always used to say . . ." She paused, smiling pityingly at me. "Were you sincere when you claimed you had never heard the name of Edward Creighton Hallaby?"

I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry," I said.

"Well, then, let me enlighten you. Edward Creighton Hallaby — God rest his soul — was for more than twenty years the commandant of the Danielson Military Academy." She squared her thin shoulders. "Danielson — as even you must know — is one of the three most select military academies in this country, and —"

"Mrs. Hallaby," I said, "there's a girl dead in the next apartment. Murdered. It's my job to find her killer. What can you tell me to help me do that?"

"Well, of all the —"

"You said you could have predicted her murder, and indicated you'd overheard things. Can you remember any specific thing — any of the men's names, for instance?"

"Well . . ."

"First, though, did you hear anything unusual over there this morning? Anything that sounded like an argument or a struggle?"

"Just before the shot, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I did. I heard her cry out — not actually scream, you understand — but just cry out, as if she had been surprised by something."

"How long was this before the shot?"

"Oh, just a few seconds."

"And then what happened?"

"Well, then I heard sounds — well, as if she were putting someone off."

"Putting them off?"

"Yes. As if some man wanted to kiss her, and she was trying to goad him on by pretending to —"

"You hear the man's voice?"

For once she looked truly sad. "No, I didn't."

"Can you tell me anything more?"

"I — I'm afraid not. . . . Oh, yes! Just before the shot there was a sort of thumping sound."

"As if a piece of furniture had been overturned?"

"Precisely. As if they'd knocked something over."

From the hall I heard the elevator doors slam open, and then the sound of heavy steps in the hall, and I knew that the tech crew and the assistant M.E. had arrived. A moment later, the sounds faded to nothing. I listened closely. I knew there would be a lot of talking and moving around in the next apartment, but I could hear nothing. Not a sound.

I took out a cigarette and started to light it.

"I'd rather you didn't smoke, if you please," Mrs. Hallaby said.

I rubbed out the cigarette in a tray. Mrs. Hallaby glared at the butt with pretty much the same expression she might have used if I'd dumped a pail of garbage in the middle of her floor.

"Mrs. Hallaby," I said, "there are several men in the next apartment now. They're making considerable noise, and yet I can't hear

a thing. I'm wondering how you were able to hear so much."

The reaction I'd expected and the reaction I got were two different things. She smiled, turned abruptly, and walked to a small carved table. When she returned she was holding a clear crystal water tumbler. She held the tumbler up for my inspection, and her smile became knowing.

"This is how I heard," she said.

I stared at her.

"Come with me," she said. She walked to the wall between her apartment and the murdered girl's and placed the bottom of the tumbler against the plaster. Then she leaned her head against the open end of the tumbler in such a way that her ear was inside it.

I didn't say anything.

She straightened and extended the tumbler to me. "Try it," she said. "The tumbler picks up sounds and amplifies them. I'm surprised that a police officer doesn't know such things."

I went through the routine with the tumbler. What she had said was true. I could hear the different voices distinctly enough to identify each of them, and I could hear the sound of footsteps and the popping of flashbulbs.

Mrs. Hallaby stood with her hands on her hips, smiling triumphantly. "Well, young man . . .?"

I handed the tumbler back to her. "Amazing," I said.

"Isn't it?" Her eyes began to shuttle between the tumbler and

the wall, and I knew she was itching to listen in on the activity over there.

"About her men friends," I said. "Can you remember any of their names?"

"Well . . ." She frowned.

"It's very important to us, Mrs. Hallaby. I know you'd like to help the forces of the law."

"Yes, yes, of course. Well, I remember only one, really. That's the man that apparently spent the night with her."

"Last night, you mean?"

"Yes. Of course I couldn't swear he was there all night, but —"

"Exactly what happened, Mrs. Hallaby?"

"Well, I awaken quite early — around six o'clock, most mornings. Usually my first act is to place the — well, *telephone* against the wall. If I hear nothing, I prepare breakfast. Otherwise —"

"You remember this man's name?"

"Quite well. It was —" she paused dramatically — "Jeffrey Stone."

"Was their conversation friendly, would you say?"

"No, indeed. It was far from that."

"How do you mean?"

"They'd been keeping up a running argument for several weeks, she and this Jeffrey Stone. It seems that Mr. Stone was jealous of her other men friends. He apparently wanted her to devote herself entirely to him."

"You hear him threaten her?"

She hesitated. "Well . . . no, I couldn't say he actually threatened her."

"You ever see this man?"

"Why, no."

"Or the girl?"

"Oh, yes. I saw the girl. Several times. In the hall and in the elevator, and several times on the street." She made a clucking noise. "A shame. She was such a pretty little thing, to be so utterly abandoned."

I turned toward the door. "We'd like to get a statement from you, Mrs. Hallaby," I said. "Would you mind if—"

"A statement? Why, I've just given you one."

"I know. I meant a written one. Would you mind if we drove you down to the station house? We'd like you to dictate —"

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"It's the usual routine, Mrs. Hallaby."

"Then, of course, I shall be glad to."

"We'll send someone around for you a little later in the day," I said. "Will that be all right?"

She nodded, trying very much to look like a martyr. It was the first really successful expression she'd had since I'd met her.

I went back to the murdered girl's apartment.

4.

The tech crew and the assistant M.E., Dave Anders, were hard at

work. The carpet was covered with chalk marks, the photographer had climbed to the top of the writing desk to get an overhead shot of the body, and the fingerprint men were dusting every flat surface in sight.

Fred Spence glanced at me a little glumly. "Looks like a real fast hit, Jake," he said. "One will get you ten it was a loid-worker."

"Maybe not," I said. "Our girl friend next door says there was an argument over here this morning. Seems Elizabeth Hanson here had been having a running feud with somebody named Jeffrey Stone."

"Yeah? Who's this Stone?"

"I don't know." I walked over to the telephone table and picked up the directory. Dave Anders glanced at me and nodded.

"Be with you in a minute, Sergeant," he said.

I nodded, running my finger down a page of S's. Jeffrey Stone was listed at an address in Greenwich Village, Five-thirty-one Charles Street. I made a note of the address and phone number in my note book.

"There was a call came in while you were talking to Mrs. Hallaby," Fred said.

"You get the name?"

"It was one of those telephone answering services. They said they had a call from a Miss Doris Webber, and that Miss Webber wanted Miss Hanson to call her back. They told me the Webber girl said it was urgent." He handed me a slip of

paper with the name and phone number. I transferred them to my note book and lit a cigarette.

Dave Anders stripped off his rubber gloves, put them in his bag, and came over.

"You wouldn't want to go out on a limb about the cause of death, would you, Dave?" I asked.

"Not me, Sergeant."

Neither of us was kidding. No matter how obvious it may seem that a person has been killed in a certain way, nothing is official until after a body is posted. People have been shot *after* they have died of poison; others have walked a considerable distance with a bullet wound through the heart, only to step in front of an automobile and be killed that way. Stranger things have happened, and will happen again. That's the reason for the postmortem. The cardinal rule in any medical examination is to establish the actual cause of death, and do it in such a way that there is no possibility, however remote, of any other cause. It is not always so simple as it sounds, but it is vital in any criminal investigation and prosecution, as well as in the settlement of estates and life insurance policies.

"One thing, though," Dave said. "You notice that stain on her lip?"

"Yeah. Blood?"

"Hard to be sure."

"Can't you check it at Bellevue?"

"No. There isn't enough for that. And it's mixed with her lipstick,

too. We couldn't do a thing with so small a quantity, Sergeant. He glanced over at the girl. "The point is, though, it might not be her blood."

"What makes you think that, Doc?"

"Well, there was no bleeding through the mouth. It's surprising, but that's the way it is. So, unless her killer got some of her blood on himself, and then brushed it against her mouth, the chances would seem pretty good that she got her teeth into someone."

"But there's no way to test the blood, right?"

"I'm afraid not. We'd need a lot more of it before we could make any kind of test."

"So, offhand, you'd say that if we got a suspect with a few teeth marks in him, we'd be pretty close to home?"

"That's the way it strikes me, Sergeant."

"Thanks, Dave. That's the kind of thing a cop likes best." I turned to Fred Spence. "Stick around till the techs are through," I said. "And you'd better call the lieutenant and ask him to send you a stake-out to leave here for a while."

"Okay. You leaving?"

"Uh-huh. I think I'll talk to this guy Stone."

"Don't forget that girl. The one that called here. Doris Webber."

"I won't."

"It shouldn't take us long."

"Fine. I'll check with you at the station house, Fred."

5.

Jeffrey Stone's room on Charles Street in the Village was even hotter than the squad room back at the Eighteenth. And it was much smaller; so small, in fact, that the two of us made the room seem cramped. He was a very handsome guy, Stone was, a big guy with a lot of chest and very long yellow hair. I went through the preliminary routine without getting any reaction from him at all. But when I told him Elizabeth Hanson was dead, I did get a reaction. He'd told me he was an actor, but there was no acting involved in the way he took the news. It took me nearly half an hour to quiet him down enough to question him further. And even then he sat on the side of his bed, staring at the wall, as if he had heard my words, and understood them, but couldn't permit himself to believe them.

I poured him a drink from the fifth on his dresser, but he didn't touch it.

"What were you and the girl arguing about this morning?" I asked.

"The same old thing," he said dully. "Other men. It was just her way, I guess. She . . . She never seemed to feel right with only one guy in the picture. I—I wanted to marry her, but she . . . she . . ." He broke off, biting his lip.

"You know any of these men personally?"

He shook his head. "No. But she'd tell me about them. Not by name, though. And sometimes I'd go to her apartment, and she wouldn't let me in. Sometimes I'd call her, and hear a guy laughing at her place. . . . Things like that."

"She was killed about eleven o'clock," I said. "Where were you at that time, Mr. Stone?"

His eyes came over to me slowly, and then moved away again. "You couldn't think I killed her. You couldn't think that."

"I don't think anything," I said. "But I do have to check. Can you prove where you were from, oh, say ten o'clock?"

He drank his whiskey and sat staring at the glass. "I can prove it," he said. "I got to my sister's house at a little after eight. I had breakfast with her and her husband, and I stayed there until about twenty minutes ago. I just got home."

I took out my note book and wrote down his sister's name and address.

He mumbled something beneath his breath, and I asked him what he'd said.

"I said she was a fine actress," he told me. "So far, she'd had only a few walk-on parts in Broadway shows, and she'd done a little television work, but she was on her way. Another year or so, and she . . ." He shrugged. "Why would anyone want to kill her? *Why?*"

"Can you think of anyone who might have? I mean, did she ever tell you of any threats? Did she have any enemies, that you know of?"

"No. Everybody was crazy about her. Men and women both."

"She have any family here in New York?"

"No. She didn't have any family at all. She was from Canada, originally, and her mother and father were dead."

"I don't like to ask this," I told him. "But we'll have to get a positive identification. We'd appreciate it if you'd go over to Bellevue and do that for us."

He nodded almost imperceptibly. "All right. And listen, officer—can I take care of the funeral and all?"

"I think we can work that out," I said.

"I haven't much," he said, "but what little I do have I'd like to . . . to . . ." He broke off again.

I poured him another drink, then went out to the hall and called his sister on the pay phone. She backed up Stone's story in every detail. I wasn't surprised. A cop seldom can afford to believe anybody about anything—until the evidence is all in—but this was once when I'd been willing to bet six months' pay that a man was telling the truth. It's a good feeling to have once in a while, when your job involves you with so many phonies.

I stepped back into the room and told him we'd call him before we sent a car over to take him to Bellevue.

He nodded. "There's one more thing I'd like to ask," he said slowly. "She had a ring. It was my mother's, until she died. I gave it to Betty about a month ago." He paused. "I thought of it as sort of an engagement ring . . . Anyhow, I'd like to have it. You know how it is. My mother wore it so long, and then Betty wore it—and, well, I'd like to keep it. It—it would mean a lot to me."

I started to tell him I hadn't noticed any ring on the girl's hand, but I caught myself. "I think we can arrange that," I said. "It'll take a little time, of course, but we'll probably be able to work it out for you."

"It'd sure mean a lot."

"What'd it look like?"

He took a sip of the second drink I'd poured him and put the glass on the floor. "It was a wide gold band," he said. "There were several small red stones set into the metal. I don't know what they were, but I'm pretty sure they weren't very valuable. The stones were set flush with the gold, all around the ring. And they were of an odd shape—something like red tears."

I nodded. "We'll see what we can do."

I went to the door.

I said so-long to him as I left, but he didn't answer.

6.

Fred Spence was waiting for me when I got back to the squad room.

"You come up with anything?" he asked.

"Nope. Stone checked out clean."

"How about the girl?"

"Doris Webber? I haven't talked to her yet."

"Want me to do that?"

"Might as well, I guess."

"What's her number again?"

I looked it up in my note book, and Fred called Miss Webber and told her he was on his way over to see her.

After he left, I rolled a Complaint Report into my typewriter and began filling it in with as much data in connection with the homicide as we'd been able to get. Then I called Headquarters and talked to the chief of the tech crew. They hadn't been able to do much for us. Most of the clear prints they'd gotten had checked out to the girl herself. There had been a number of larger prints — presumably male — but they'd been too blurred to work with. I asked the chief to call me the moment he got anything worth while, and hung up.

It was much too early to expect anything from the postmortem. I wasn't really expecting anything, but as I said before, you never can tell.

It was a tough proposition to face, but the fact was that we were stymied. I couldn't even call Stats

and Records and ask for a list of possibles. Without a single fact about the man we wanted, without a witness, without a single clue — without *anything*, it looked like we were in for a hard time.

Fred came back an hour later. Doris Webber had an alibi for the entire day, and she'd convinced Fred she knew nothing about the murder. She'd called Elizabeth Hanson because she'd just heard of a possible opening for her in summer stock, up in Connecticut. She'd wanted Elizabeth to get up there in time for the audition. Other than the fact that the girls were friendly in a professional way, there seemed to be little connection between them. Fred had long-distanced the theater in Connecticut, and checked out Miss Webber's story. The producer had told him Miss Webber had spoken up for Elizabeth Hanson and that he had agreed to hold the part open another day.

And so there we were. Nowhere.

We went back to the apartment house and talked to several of the other tenants and the resident manager. We called Miss Webber again, got a list of Elizabeth Hanson's friends, and talked to every one of them. We talked to her agent, the delivery men who served her building, the man who did her hair, the stores where she sometimes modeled clothes. We talked to the producers and directors of the stage shows she'd been in, and to every-

one connected with the television shows she'd done.

We knocked off once for sandwiches and coffee, and once again, along about three A.M., for a few hours' sleep — and at ten o'clock the next day we were still nowhere. The autopsy had established positively that the girl had died from the bullet wound, and that was it. The tech crew had checked out every fingerprint, but they'd come up with nothing except the girl's. A set of her prints had been fed through the IBM machines at Headquarters, but the result had been negative. Another set had been sent to the FBI in Washington, with the request for a teletype reply. The reply had just come in. Like our own check, it was negative. Which meant that if our girl had ever been in trouble, she'd somehow avoided arrest.

Fred and I sat in the squad room, drinking coffee, and trying to think up a new angle.

The phone rang and I lifted it.

"This is Barney Coe, in Lost Property, Sarge."

"Hi, Barney. What've you got?"

"You called us and asked us to be on the lookout for a ring with red stones. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Well, we've been going through this morning's DB 60's, and I think maybe we've come up with something."

"What's the description?"

"Wait a minute. . . . Okay. It

reads, 'One three-eighths inch fourteen carat yellow gold band with seven garnet stones.'"

I was on my feet before I'd hung up the phone. "What pawnbroker?" I asked.

"DeLima's, on Eighth Avenue. You know where it is?"

"Yeah, I know. Thanks, Barney."

"No trouble, Sarge. I hope you make out."

7.

"What's up?" Fred asked.

"Lost Prop's got a DB 60 on a ring. It looks like it might be the one I told you about, the one Jeffrey Stone gave our girl."

"Maybe this is the break."

"Maybe." I called Stone and arranged to pick him up in fifteen minutes for a trip to the pawnbroker's. Then Fred and I told the lieutenant where we were going, and went downstairs to check out an RMP car.

"Sounds good, you say?" Fred asked.

"Couldn't sound better."

The DB 60 card, from which Barney Coe had read, is the form furnished by the police to every pawnbroker in the city. Pawnbrokers are required to fill out one of these forms for every item they receive, and they must do it the same day of receipt. At the close of business each day, they mail these forms to Headquarters. There the forms are checked against lists of lost and stolen property. In case of a

match-up, the police call the person whose property has been lost or stolen and arrange to take him to the pawnbroker for identification and recovery.

At the pawn shop, Jeff Stone identified the ring at once, but we couldn't return it to him. It was our one and only piece of evidence.

The pawn record showed the ring had been hocked by a woman named Ann Hutchins, and listed an Eighth Avenue address not far from the pawn shop.

8.

Ann Hutchins was, at the most, about seventeen. I hadn't known her by name, but I recognized her immediately as one of the Eighth Avenue B-girls. But she was smarter than most. She didn't try to be coy. She told us the ring had been given to her by a boy named Frank Rogers. She said he had given it to her yesterday afternoon, and that, as soon as Frank left her room, she had gone straight to the hock shop. She had, she said, planned to tell Frank she'd lost the ring. She volunteered the name of a run-down hotel on Ninth Avenue, where she told us Frank lived and where we could probably find him at this hour. We asked her if she had a picture of Rogers. She did, and showed it to us. He didn't look much older than she was, a thin, hawk-faced youth with hardly any shoulders at all.

We went back out to the RMP and drove over to the hotel on Ninth.

Just as we started across the sidewalk, a young man came out of the hotel. He took one look at us, and then whirled and ran back inside, with Fred and me right behind him.

As he came abreast of the desk, he skidded to a stop and turned to face us, one hand at his pocket.

But Fred Spence's gun was already out. "Don't try it, Rogers!" he said.

Fred Spence had guessed right. Rogers was a loid-worker, as well as a heroin addict. Once he realized we had him cold — what with proof that the fatal bullet had come from his gun, the garnet ring, and teeth marks in his left forearm — he seemed to take pleasure in telling us about it. The girl had come in a minute or so after he'd let himself into her apartment with his strip of celluloid. He'd jumped her, and tried to choke her, but she'd been stronger than he'd thought. When she'd sunk her teeth into his arm, he'd decided to kill her. He'd then stripped the ring off her finger, dug the wallet out of her purse, and gotten away down the fire stairs.

When Rogers finished with his admission, he mopped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand and sneered at me.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Can't you cheap cops even afford air-conditioning?"

I didn't say anything. I didn't remind him how much hotter it was in that little chair up at Sing Sing.

To a Wax Doll



*There wasn't any difficulty about finding the dope peddler.
It was just a matter of applying a little pressure . . .*

BARBARA lay on her side, facing me, beautiful with the relaxed softness of sleep. My wife was thirty-two, but in sleep she looked no more than twenty. I studied her face a moment, and then, knowing how little it took to wake her, I

got out of bed carefully and walked on bare feet to the bathroom. She was still asleep when I finished dressing and left for the station house.

In the squad room, I lifted a con-

BY ARNOLD MARMOR

tainer of coffee from Joe Hayes' desk, and drank half of it.

"Don't drink it all, Walt," he said.

"I'm tired of waiting," I said.

"You talking about Liddie White again?"

"That's right."

He frowned. "Don't get any crazy ideas, Walt. The lieutenant won't like it."

"To hell with him."

"Why don't you wait a couple of days? Hell, Tim Casey is one of the best men on the force. Liddie wouldn't be getting dope without his seeing it."

"She's getting it somewhere," I said.

"Maybe she'd stocked up on the stuff. You ever figure that?"

"Sure, I figured it. And I'm still tired of waiting." I handed the coffee back to him. "I'm going over there."

Tim Casey was on his way toward my car even before I'd cut the motor. He saluted, grinning at me. "Hello, Sergeant."

"Hello, Tim. Any action?"

"Not a damn bit. She hasn't been out at all."

"Okay. Well, as long as I'm here, we might as well make the most of it. Why don't you go down the street and have some breakfast? I'll spell you a while."

"That's a hell of a good idea, Sergeant. I'll make it fast." He

turned and walked off toward the diner at the corner.

I left the car and headed for the brownstone where Liddie White lived. The building was near the middle of the block, flanked by a cut-rate drugstore and a grimy-windowed bar. I climbed three flights of sagging stairs, walked along a dark corridor, and knocked on Liddie's door.

The door opened a little, showing one gray eye and part of an unnaturally white face. The eye narrowed, and Liddie started to close the door. I got my foot in it.

"Open up, Liddie," I said.

"What the hell do you want?"

I pulled the door all the way open and stepped inside. Liddie slammed it shut behind me, and then leaned against it, staring at me. "What the hell do you want?" she said again. She was a very pretty woman, Liddie was, even when her gray eyes were angry and the uncombed auburn hair splayed loosely across her back and shoulders. Her body, beneath the thin material of her housecoat, was lush, and she had the smallest waist I'd ever seen.

"Don't you go out any more, Liddie?" I asked.

"Look, copper. I've been a real good girl. You got no right to come barging in here like this."

"I didn't barge in," I said. "You invited me in. You insisted on it. Remember?"

"You're just like all the others. You haven't even got a warrant."

I smiled at her. "That's right, Liddie. No warrant. You could probably get me in a lot of trouble."

She glared at me. "Damn you. You know I can't get *anybody* in trouble."

I nodded. "Just so we understand each other, Liddie."

"If you're looking for Horse, you're wasting your time. There isn't any here."

"It's here," I said. "It has to be. We've had a tail on you for almost two weeks. You haven't made a buy in all that time. And with a big habit like yours, Liddie, that means you've got a supply right here."

"Since when are cops interested in users? What'll it get you to hang a beef on me? You think the commissioner will give you a gold star?"

"I'm not interested in you, Liddie. I want your pusher."

"You crazy? You think I'd cut off my supply?"

"You can always get another. Who's the guy, Liddie?"

She took a slow step toward me, and there was fear in her eyes now. "Give me a break, for God's sake."

"I'm giving you one. I know you've got heroin here. I'm not even going to look for it. All I want is the name of your pusher, and an idea of where to find him."

She bit at her lower lip a moment. "What'll I do when the pile's gone?"

"You'll find another pusher. You junkies always do." I paused. "This is the last time around, Liddie. Tell me who and where."

She told me who and where.

I let myself in with one of my skeleton keys. There was no one home. I went through the pusher's apartment until I found the stuff. I'd expected more, but there were only seven packets of it. I stuffed them into my pocket, darkened the room, and sat down in an easy chair to wait.

An hour crawled by, and then another, and finally the door opened. I got up silently, slid my hand down into my trenchcoat pocket, and worked my fingers around the butt of my short-barreled .38. The guy was fumbling for the light switch, a very tall guy with outsize shoulders.

When the light came on, I said, "Easy, Carter. Keep your hands in sight."

He closed the door slowly, and if there was any expression at all on his face, it was only a very mild surprise.

"You a cop?" he asked.

"That's right. Come over here."

He stayed where he was. "You been here long?"

"Long enough to find the stuff."

"Yeah. Well, that's not so good, is it?" His right hand came up to one of the buttons on his coat and he began to toy with it.

"I told you to come over here," I said.

"Can we make a deal?" he asked. "I'll make it pretty good."

"No deal," I said.

He nodded slowly, as if thinking it over, and then suddenly his hand was inside his coat.

I could have shot him then, but I didn't want to ruin a good trenchcoat. I jerked the .38 out and shot him twice, once in the stomach and once in the face.

When I got home, the first thing I noticed was the ash tray. It was loaded with butts. I closed the door and took off my coat.

Barbara came in from the kitchen. I tried not to look at her face. I knew what I'd see there.

"Any luck?" she asked. "I — I've been going crazy, Walt."

"In my trenchcoat pocket," I said.

She grabbed up my coat and shoved her hand into one of the pockets.

She was so jittery she dropped the coat. She picked it up and clawed through the other pocket, whimpering a little. I had to look away from her.

"Is this all?" she asked. "Just two?"

"There were only seven packets to begin with," I told her. "I had to take five of them to the station house, to book as evidence."

"You turned over *five* of them? *Why?* Damn you, Walt!"

"There's a man dead because of this," I said. "I had to make it look good."

But she wasn't even listening. She was too busy tearing open one of the packets of heroin.



What's Your Verdict?

No. 3 -- The Angry Man

BY SAM ROSS

HARRY AND ALICE, everybody agreed, were about the poorest excuse for a happily married couple that the town had ever seen. Almost every night, the neighbors could hear the roaring voice of big Harry arguing with slim, blonde Alice, shouting at her, insulting her. After a while, there might be silence. You could only hear the sound of Harry's fists if you listened very closely. The neighbors prided themselves on not being eavesdroppers, and besides, they didn't want to get involved. They didn't listen to the blows that followed many of the arguments.

Things might have gone on that way for some time, if Tim Ellis hadn't heard about it.

The neighbors had kept the facts of the situation from Tim, who lived on the other side of town, because they knew that he'd been in love with Alice and probably would have married her if Harry hadn't been around. Tim was a shy, quiet boy with glasses, but he had a terrible temper. There was no telling what he'd do when he got mad. And when some of the neighborhood kids

dropped a few hints about Harry and Alice, Tim got mad.

His mother tried to dissuade him from confronting Harry, but Tim stood firm. The very next night after he'd discovered what was going on, he marched across town to the house where Harry and Alice lived.

He heard the voices halfway down the block. They stopped just before he got to the house itself, but he didn't even slow his stride. Behind his rimless glasses his eyes were glittering and small as he rapped on the door.

There was no answer. From inside the house came the sound of a blow. Tim knocked on the door again. Harry's footsteps came to the door and Harry swung it open.

He just stared at Tim without saying a word. Tim didn't speak either, but moved right past Harry into the house. Alice was huddled in a corner of the living-room, against a divan. Her shoulders were shaking with sobs. The sight of her was the final spark that really set Tim off. Harry was a few steps behind him, so Tim moved forward quickly, grabbed a poker from the fireplace set, turned,

and rapped Harry over the head with it.

Harry went down. When he was on the floor Tim turned to Alice.

He tried to say something tender and protective. But he didn't have a chance.

"You murderer!" Alice screamed. "The least you could do would be to call a doctor."

By this time Tim was calmed down. Though sure Harry was dead, Tim called a doctor, and when the doctor came Tim got the shock of his life.

Harry was pronounced in good condition. The doctor did insist on a few days of hospitalization, but after that, he said, Harry would be as good as new.

Tim simply left the house during the excitement and went home. Nobody noticed he had gone. He stayed at home for three days.

By then Harry was settled in the hospital, Alice watching over him day and night and helping to feed him most of the hospital meals. But by some mischance, one shipment of food to the hospital was tainted — filled with the microscopic botulins which cause food spoilage and which result in ptomaine poisoning. Alice innocently fed Harry some of that food.

Harry, along with one other inmate of the hospital, died of its poison that night. Working frantically,

doctors and nurses managed to save the rest of the patients. But the damage was done.

When the uproar had died down and the hospital had established new checks against food spoilage, Alice went to a lawyer and had Tim arrested for homicide. "After all," she argued, "If Tim hadn't hit my Harry over the head with a poker, he'd never have gone to the hospital, and he'd never have been poisoned."

When Tim found out what Alice was up to, he protested violently.

"How was I to blame?" he asked Alice and her lawyer. "The doctor admitted that I didn't cause Harry any serious injury with that poker. He had to go to the hospital for a few days, but that's nothing serious. He just had bad luck, that's all."

Who was right? What's *your* verdict?

ANSWER:

It was Tim who had the bad luck. The law rules that, if there is an assault with intent to kill, and the assault puts the victim in a situation where death is the result, then — even though the man committing the assault didn't intend his victim to meet death in that form — the man who committed the assault is liable to conviction for homicide. In this case, Alice was left all alone, since Tim, after a brief trial, was packed off to prison.



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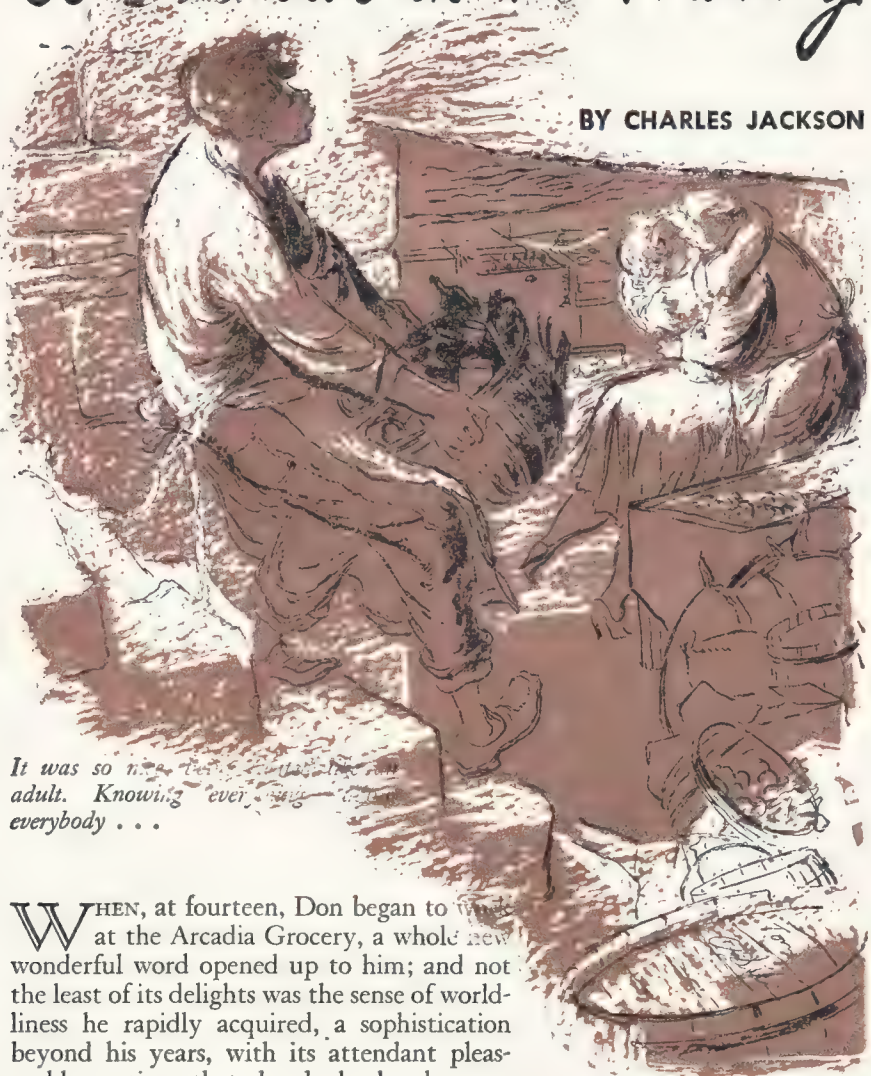
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A Bachelor in the Making

BY CHARLES JACKSON



It was so new to him, the feeling of being an adult. Knowing everybody . . .

WHEN, at fourteen, Don began to work at the Arcadia Grocery, a whole new wonderful word opened up to him; and not the least of its delights was the sense of worldliness he rapidly acquired, a sophistication beyond his years, with its attendant pleasurable notion that he had already seen

enough of life to disillusion him with a certain well-known institution.

He came to work as soon as school was out at three-thirty, and worked until the store closed at six; but on Saturday it was all day, from seven-thirty in the morning till ten-thirty at night. He loved it. He liked his two employers very much, the partners Mr. Heffelfinger and Mr. Kunkel; they were awfully good to him, and treated him as an equal. He loved, too, the importance of being behind a counter to so many people he had known all his life, and who had, till now, regarded him as a kid. And he loved all the gossip; the secret lives of friend and stranger alike were openly discussed in his presence as though he wasn't fourteen at all, and he soon learned to join in the general, ribald amusement that seemed to be universal in the grown-up world and occupy the greater part of their conversation. It was quite different from the veiled allusions he often overheard at home, when his mother uttered half a sentence and then cut herself off with a sigh and a headshake over the carryings-on of one of their neighbors; or when his father laughed outright over some tidbit he had brought home but which he only fully disclosed to Don's mother when he himself was out of hearing. At the Arcadia Grocery gossip was not only openly rife but there was something even better: if you kept your eyes and ears open, actual

evidences were all around you of the choice scandals from which that gossip sprang. Like Mrs. Corbin, for instance, and the telephone.

Mrs. Corbin was an attractive, neat woman, married to Joe Corbin who repaired watches at Platt the Jeweler's. She had a pleasant open smile, impersonal eyes, and wonderful eyebrows, plucked and pencilled, that rose in twin symmetrical arcs almost to the brim of her close-fitting felt hat, giving her a provocative, surprised look. Every afternoon about four, Mrs. Corbin came into the store and bought her two pounds of sugar; it was during the war with the Kaiser, and the sale of sugar was strictly kept to two pounds per day per customer. Then she would linger at the counter for a while, chatting amiably as if she had all the time in the world; but it was clear to Don's fast-maturing perceptions that Mrs. Corbin had other things on her mind besides the small talk; that her thoughts were elsewhere.

Don had got so used to measuring out the regulation two pounds of sugar that he could do it accurately, almost every time, without weighing it. He took the aluminum scoop, dug into the big sugar barrel that swung from below the counter on a squeaking arm-like arrangement, held the scoop high in the air, and let the sugar fall beautifully into the paper sack, which he had already whipped open with a professional flip of his left hand; then he plunked

the bag onto the scales, watched the needle wag to and fro for a second, and there it was: two pounds even. He folded the flap doubly over the top, wound the white string twice around the sack, and breaking the string with a smart quick yank, he handed the sugar over to Mrs. Corbin. And then she would say, every darned afternoon — the arched eyebrows rippling higher and the cool impersonal eyes gazing directly into his: "Oh, I just remembered! May I use the phone a minute, please . . ."

"Why certainly," Don would say, never batting an eye, "just help yourself, Mrs. Corbin." Then, because he knew what was coming and, as became a man of the world, must be discreet, he turned back to the sugar barrel and tossed off a few more two-pound bags, in readiness for the next customers who asked for them.

Mrs. Corbin stepped to the wall telephone with the goose neck a few feet away, picked up the phone book that hung from a cord beside it, and opening the directory to somewhere in the middle, she would peer intently at the long list of names there and run an inquiring finger slowly down the page. "Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . ." she would murmur, just loud enough for him to hear, and then give Central the number in lowered tones that could not be heard at all. Don smiled to himself. He knew what the number was — 424, Hersey's saloon; and Mrs. Corbin was calling

up Mr. Hersey to find out when he was to be free and where she was to pick him up this time, before they drove out to the pines after supper to park for awhile after dark. He knew this because Mr. Heffelfinger had told him, with a hearty laugh, that that's what was going on; and now, after so many afternoons of "Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . ." he could see it for himself. He was entranced. He would love to have told his father and mother, but of course they would only have said he was taking a great deal for granted, smarty, a very great deal indeed, and had a dirty mind besides. Instead, he told three or four of his friends in High School, and together they laughed and laughed.

Within a few weeks after he had started at the Arcadia Grocery, Mr. Heffelfinger suddenly changed Don's dinner hour on Saturday noon. At first, he had gone home to dinner at eleven-thirty when Mr. Kunkel did, returning at twelve-thirty to relieve Mr. Heffelfinger and Jake, the other assistant. Now, for a reason that wasn't at once clear to Don, Mr. Heffelfinger asked him to switch places with Jake, and Jake went home for dinner at the same time as Mr. Kunkel. This left Mr. Heffelfinger and Don alone together during the noon hour, a time of day when hardly anybody ever came into the store at all. But one of these few was Miss Bye, who invariably arrived a few minutes after Jake

and Mr. Kunkel had gone home.

Miss Bye was a very short, very fat woman of maybe fifty, with hair dyed a lifeless jet-black like a wig, and puffy cheeks coated with talcum powder so thick that she looked as if she had just recovered from having her face stuck in the flour barrel in the back room. She wore a single large pearl on each ear lobe, and her pudgy hands glittered with rings. In her shiny silk dress of a changeable coppery color, she swelled outward in front like a pouter pigeon and in back like a lawn roller, and she had been stuffed so tightly into her iridescent dress that she looked like a gorgeous pincushion.

"Ahhh, Miss Bye," Mr. Heffelfinger would say, surprised; and after the barest word or two about the weather, he would draw his order pad from the pocket of his cotton apron-gown and remove the indelible pencil from behind his ear. "And what will it be today, Miss Bye?" It was always a nice piece of salt pork, not too fat and not too lean, or a quart of molasses, or some sour pickles or new potatoes — something, at any rate, that would take them down to the cellar.

Mr. Heffelfinger was very fat himself, and fiftyish, too; but he was a nice man, a really kind man, and Don was fond of him. He had silver-gray hair and small, merry, blue eyes, and until Don got onto the situation between him and Miss Bye, he had always thought of Mr. Heffelfinger as a kind of ideal

father, except that his own father, so stern but so good, was better. But he was not in the least shocked or even dismayed. With his newfound sophistication he shrugged and smiled to himself, and thought: Well, that's the way of the world, there's marriage for you all right all right. . . . And wisely, as Mr. Heffelfinger expected him to do, he pretended to notice nothing. The presence of Jake, it seemed, had proved inconvenient.

But all the same, there was occasionally an awkward moment, a moment that Don retailed hilariously at school on Monday morning. When, as sometimes happened, a customer came in during the noon hour and innocently asked for a piece of salt pork or a pint of pickles, all the resources of Don's ripening experience had to be brought into play. As he approached the stairs that led down to the cellar, he began to whistle *Over There* or *Keep the Home Fires Burning* or something else that he could whistle equally loud; and as he reached the bottom step he would even burst into song. A second or two later he came upon Mr. Heffelfinger and Miss Bye, standing, a careful couple of feet apart, beside the molasses barrel or the potato bin; — under the harsh glare of the single electric bulb Mr. Heffelfinger's round face was purple as an eggplant, his forehead streamed with sweat, and Miss Bye's lustrous billowing bosom pantingly rose and fell. Mr. Heffelfinger

bent forward slightly from the waist, all attention and business, the order pad held in his raised palm with the indelible pencil poised above it, while he murmured: "And perhaps, Miss Bye, I might also suggest some Bermuda onions? We have some beauties, just in the other day. . . ." Don walked by acutely self-conscious, his eyes straight ahead; but on the way back upstairs he was already grinning, and he thought gleefully to himself: Boy! won't Ernie and Eddie and Harry love this! . . .

So life at the Arcadia Grocery went on, wonderful as ever. Besides giving him the chance of being in on the exciting events of the adult world, it had other delights, of course. Don loved to amaze a customer with his lightning calculation of the cost of $6\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of bananas, for instance, at $8\frac{1}{2}$ cents a pound, a customer, that is, who didn't know that this total was simultaneously registered, along with the weight, on the reverse side of the horizontal cylinder above the scales. During an idle moment he loved to stand in the front window looking through the spray of the tiny fountain that squealed faintly like a distant peanut wagon and kept the lettuce and spinach fresh, and wave to friends who went by on Main Street. Every time he passed the cold meat counter he gave the handle of the slicer a spin and helped himself to a fresh slice of boiled ham or dried beef. When a customer asked if the cheese

was strong today, he cut off a small piece with the tremendous cleaver-like knife, sampled it himself, then pronounced the verdict with authority. And he early loved the long, democratic Saturday evenings when the store filled up with farmers and their families, loud with greetings and news as if they hadn't laid eyes on one another for months, chattering away in their Holland-Dutch accents and generously accepting him as one of themselves.

Meanwhile Mrs. Corbin continued to run her finger down the open page of the telephone book in the afternoon and murmur aloud, "Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . ."; Mr. Heffelfinger and Miss Bye continued to go down cellar on Saturday noon and inspect the salt pork together; Mrs. Hanks continued to climb the stairs to Dr. Wallace's office above the store on Saturday nights after office hours were long since over and Mr. Hadley continued not too surreptitiously to pay Mrs. Denton's exorbitant grocery bills and the good-looking Mrs. Burton Slade, emerging from the store, continued to be picked up at the curb with not at all surprising frequency by Mr. Cunningham or his well-paid chauffeur Art Holmes, who, by the greatest good fortune for the package-laden Mrs. Slade, just happened to be passing by at that very moment; items, all, to be relished and hooted over with Harry and Eddie and Ernie . . .

One afternoon, Mr. Heffelfinger

came from the phone and said: "Don, will you run over to Mrs. Oliver's with this vanilla like a good boy? She's making a sponge cake for supper and needs it right away."

"Sure thing. Be back in a jiffy" — for the Olivers lived less than a block away. He stuck the bottle of vanilla in his apron pocket and went out; and it was fun going along the street in his long work-gown with *The Arcadia Grocery* stencilled on both the front and back.

"Come in, Donnie boy," Mrs. Oliver sang out nasally from the kitchen as he came up the back steps.

Mrs. Oliver was a florid-faced woman of about forty with a dumpy figure, from eating too much candy, it was said, and she talked through her nose with a whine that grated on the ear; but she was a good soul, the kind that people spoke of as "harmless" and "well-meaning," and Don had always thought her quite nice.

"Come on into the den a minute, why don't you?" she said. "I want to show you my new books. You like books, I know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Oliver, I'd like to."

They entered the den and she waved her hand toward a series of bookshelves along one wall. "I had it all done over by that man at Sibley, Lindsey & Curr," she said.

"Very nice."

"I knew you'd be impressed," she said.

But he was not looking at the bookshelves. His eye was caught by a pendant hanging from her plump neck, with a large yellow stone that might have been a topaz. He peered at it, and then said: "Gee, that looks like a nice stone, Mrs. Oliver. Pretty, too."

"This old lavalier? You like it?" She bent her head to look at the pendant, and the double chins spread upward toward her cheeks. Then she smiled and said: "Tell you a little secret, Donnie. Just between you and I. You know who gave me that lavalier? Your father."

Don felt the hot red flush rise upward from his neck to his very ears, but Mrs. Oliver didn't notice. "And look," she went on, reaching toward the table for a candy box inlaid with different-colored woods in such a way as to depict the Statue of Liberty, with a tugboat in the foreground. "He gave me this, too; isn't it cunning? Couple of years ago your father was mighty sweet on me, for a while."

"I've got to go now, Mrs. Oliver," he said. "I got to get back . . ."

And as he walked in through the front door of the Arcadia Grocery he saw Mr. Heffelfinger, whose face could get so purple in the cool cellar, bending toward Mrs. Newman with order pad and pencil in hand. *You old fool*, Don said under his breath, bitterly: *You miserable, hypocritical, sweaty, purple old fool. . . .*

WE WORKED the clock around, four of us at a time, in three shifts, so that it was two to one it wouldn't happen on my tour. The fact that it did was probably fate or justice or something because, you see, the whole thing was my idea.

I was on the four-to-twelve swing and

A Life for a Life

Tom was just doing his job. He didn't understand why Hollenbeck thought he was a killer.

Hollenbeck was with me. He's Third-Grade, a boy wonder only on the cops four years and in plain clothes already, but not a bad kid. Only he had a little to learn, of course.

We were in a supply room, off the hospital lobby, to the left of the visitor's reception desk. We

BY ROBERT
TURNER



kept the door open and fixed a mirror so we could see out without being seen from the desk. On the other side of the lobby in a small office were the other two. Smitty, another Third Grade but he'd done it the hard way, twelve years and a couple of special commendations. And Weigand. Sergeant Weigand, in charge of this.

For three nights Hollenbeck and I sat it out, smoking too much, talking not enough. It was on our nerves now and there was still two nights to go. The Lieutenant gave it five. They only kept women in the maternity ward five days on an average these times.

We were on a half hour this night when Hollenbeck started on me again. He was cute about it. I guess they *get* pretty cute, graduating a University before they join the cops, these kids. At some things, anyhow.

"You do much fishing, Tom?" Hollenbeck asked. Hollenbeck is the crew-cut, rosy-cheeked outdoors type. He looked maybe twenty although he was at least six, seven years older. He looked very innocent.

"Why?" I said. I knew what was coming. I just didn't know in what form this time.

"Well, I was thinking about all the different *ways* of fishing there are," he said, his eyes on the mirror, not on me. "Like, there's seining. You get a bunch of guys and get drunk and whoop it up and drag

a big net from bank to bank, along a small creek. You get a lot of fish. It can't miss. It's real sport. The fish don't have a chance. Or you can set fish traps. That's almost as good."

"I see." I felt my neck getting red. The comparison wasn't too good but it was different.

"Well," he continued, "me, I like to fish, too. But I like to use a fly-rod. Sometimes I don't have much luck, but I don't know, when I do hook something I get a bigger bang out of it. I got a silly notion that even fish deserves at least a fighting chance. . . . And, of course, there's shooting fish in a barrel. You ever do that, Tom?"

It took awhile to ease the needle out of my arm so I could talk. Then I told him: "All the time. When I'm not doing that, I'm spotlighting deer."

He looked at me long and blandly and he didn't say anything else. After awhile I felt some of the red go out of my neck. "You've got the wrong man," I said, then. "Weigand, over there, is the one. He *likes* to shoot. He's the sportsman. Ask him to show you his target medals. Or better, ask him about how he shot three unarmed kids in a stolen car, once. And watch his eyes. Me, I don't consider this like hunting *or* fishing; it's a job and I do it the quickest, easiest way I can. You understand that?"

He didn't. I could tell. He said: "That's what I mean. He'll shoot him. Weigand will kill Meade be-

fore he can open his mouth, even. You know that. Eventually Meade would have been picked up somewhere in the regular way. It didn't have to be like this."

I told Hollenbeck that I didn't know Weigand would be in on it and I didn't like that, either, but there was nothing I could do. I'd thought about everything except that, though, when I first got the idea, before I took it to the Lieutenant. I said:

"Meade took a chance on getting killed, himself, breaking out and it didn't bother him to slug that guard. The guard died, don't forget. Maybe it wouldn't bother Meade to kill a few more rather than go back for the rest of that life jolt. The sooner he's nailed, no matter how, the sooner he'll stop being even a possible menace."

Hollenbeck snorted. "He likely won't even have a gun. Meade wasn't a gun boy. He never carried one. And they don't change."

I got a little sick of all of this, of trying to justify something that maybe couldn't be justified and one way or the other it wasn't any skin off Hollenbeck. I started to tell him that fair or unfair, dirty pool or not, if the gimmick worked and we recaptured Meade, it would mean a commendation for me for cooking it up. A commendation would mean points on the next Sergeant's exam. I wanted that promotion. I *had* to have it now, with another mouth to feed. But I didn't tell that to Hol-

lenbeck. I still didn't think he'd get it.

This idea was simple and I wasn't exactly proud of it, but it was practical. Some nine months ago, before Danny Meade was picked up for his fourth breaking-and-entering, he was living with an Agnes Borst. Later we learned that when Meade was convicted, she'd gone back to her family in the midwest. Meade didn't know this, though. Nobody in the underworld knew what happened to her. We found out by accident.

Anyhow, when I heard Danny escaped and was believed holed-up in the city, I got this idea to root him out. A snow-bird stoolie did the job for us. He circulated it around that Agnes Borst was in Polyclinic, registered as a Mrs. Nizlek, having a baby, Danny Meade's baby. It figured that when Meade heard that, he'd want to see his kid. What man wouldn't?

We had some trouble getting the hospital to coöperate but after we assured them there'd be no shooting in the building under any circumstances, they agreed.

It was nine o'clock and visiting hours were about over and I somehow couldn't get Hollenbeck's attitude out of my mind and was wondering if maybe he was right and maybe there weren't any game laws for hunting criminals but maybe there were some other kind, when a little red light flicked over the door of our room, inside.

I looked toward the mirror and saw a slightly built man with his hat pulled low over his face, talking to the receptionist. Huskily, I said to Hollenbeck: "Yea-boy, let's go."

We were wearing white intern coats. Meade didn't know any of us so we figured to get right up to him and grab him before he knew what was happening. None of us were to speak until the first one reached him and collared him.

Hollenbeck and I walked out of the room and toward the man at the desk, who was looking nervously toward Smitty and Weigand, approaching from the other side. But the white coats threw him off. He swung his eyes back to the receptionist. I heard him say: "I wasn't listening. What ward did you say she's in?"

It was obvious we were going to pin him easily. I was in front of Hollenbeck and only a step away from Meade and he still wasn't tipped. Then I looked past him and saw Weigand's moon face. He was flushed and his fat-embedded eyes shone terribly and I knew this was going to go wrong. This wasn't going to be good enough for him.

I wish I could describe Weigand better. He isn't really so awful fat. He's more solid, chunky, yet he gives this impression of terrible grossness. And not because he's dirty. He's neat and clean enough. I don't know what it is. But Weigand's eyes I can tell you about. They usually look dull and stupid

but they didn't look that way now. They were as near to what you'd call laughing as that kind of eyes would ever get.

Weigand's voice, a little reedy for a man his bulk, called out: "Watch it, Meade! Don't try to make any break!"

Meade hadn't even known we were alive but now he almost came out of his skin. His head swiveled and he ducked under my too quick, desperate lunge. The woman behind the desk screamed. When I looked around again, Meade's spindly legs were scissoring toward the hospital's front door.

Weigand wasn't hardly hurrying, it seemed. Hollenbeck and Smitty were running and yet Weigand still got to the door before them. His gun was in his hand at his side. I'll give him this: he kept our promise and there was no shooting inside the building. But as he went outside his gun slammed twice.

When I got out there Weigand was standing on the hospital steps, blowing smoke from the barrel of his Special. He turned to the rest of us. Once I'd had a golf partner make a hole in one. I'd never seen anyone so tickled with himself, so proud and the whole big world was his own little old oyster that moment. Not until now. Weigand's moon face held that same expression.

He gestured with the gun. "There he is." He was so happy and excited spittle sprayed when he spoke. "How's that for shooting, huh?"

About thirty yards away on the lawn in front of the hospital there was a crumpled heap in the tree-and-shrubbery-dappled moon-glow. Neither Hollenbeck nor I, nor Smitty spoke.

"Fifty, maybe sixty feet, by God," Weigand blurted. "And he was running, dodging, don't forget. You shouldn't have seen him, almost doubled-over and spinning, twisting like a damn broken field runner. For a moment, all those highlights and shadows from the moon and shrubbery out there, I thought I was going to miss. But they don't just hand me those target shooting medals every year for nothing, by God."

Nobody said anything. But very deliberately, Hollenbeck hawked and spat, his eyes on Weigand while he did it. You couldn't mistake what he had in mind. I guess maybe instinctively I had to show Hollenbeck I agreed with him on this, no matter what. I said:

"Oh, goody, goody. You can carve another notch on your gun, now, Sarge. And maybe we can call you Wild Bill Weigand — The Only Law West Of The Polyclinic?"

Ordinarily Weigand doesn't take stuff like that. He knew nobody liked him and at times he almost gloried in that but you weren't supposed to come right out and say it. You were supposed to be too afraid, to have too much respect for his rank. But neither Hollenbeck nor I seemed to get through to him, now.

"Come on," he said. "Let's take a look. Five'll get you ten if I didn't hit with both slugs and he's ready for the meat wagon."

He started down the steps and across the grass toward that huddled dark heap, moving fast. We followed more slowly, like men on their feet for the first time after a long illness.

Danny Meade had no gun in his long, thin, dirty-nailed hand. Smitty searched him and there was no weapon on him at all, not even a pocket knife. He was still alive. If you'd call it that. His thin, once good looking face was so gray you could see the veins in it. His cheeks were all sucked in and his lips were two pale welts against his teeth. Sweat was globed on his face and his stringy hair was soaked with it.

I'd seen death in men's eyes before and I knew Meade didn't have long. He was still able to talk, though, in a hoarse whisper. He lay there, spilling curses at all of us while Hollenbeck ran to Emergency for help.

Weigand stood over Meade and after awhile he said, chuckling: "Ah-ah-ah! Better save those last few breaths, Danny. Sticks and stones, you know . . ." Weigand was a great one for worn out sayings.

I turned away. I felt sick at even being part of the same race as Weigand, let alone being on the same job. I heard Hollenbeck, back again, say: "Why did you do it, Sarge?" He asked that as though he'd been knocking himself out trying to figure

the answer ever since it had happened but now he had to give up; the riddle was too much for him. "If you hadn't hollered —"

"Why, he reached toward his pocket, didn't he?" Weigand cut Hollenbeck off. "What you so upset about? He killed a prison guard, didn't he? Well, a life for a life."

"I didn't see him reach for anything." Hollenbeck's voice sounded gritty.

"That's funny. *I* did." I could almost see Weigand looking straight and hard at Hollenbeck and grinning.

We all knew, then, that's the way it would be. No charges against Weigand for this. Nobody could prove he hadn't seen Meade make a threatening gesture. I wondered how many more times this would happen. Weigand had at least ten years before retirement.

At the same time I could feel young Hollenbeck's eyes boring into my back and they felt a little like Weigand's bullets must have felt to Meade. I walked away.

The doc said Meade might go in fifteen minutes or he might last the night. He lapsed into unconsciousness after they took him to Emergency. He might or might not come out of it again, the doc said.

Weigand assigned me to stay with Meade. He thought that was a master touch, I guess. He could see by looking at me how I felt about my idea ending the way it had. The way I felt was not good. And it had

nothing to do with the fact that I probably wouldn't get any commendation now that the gimmick had inadvertently set Weigand up for some live target practice, the way even the Brass in the department felt about him. But I didn't care about that. That wasn't what was bothering me.

Weigand and the others were about to leave when Meade came to again and whispered something to the doc. The doc had to bend his head down almost to Meade's mouth, his voice was now so weak. I heard the doc say: "Okay."

Then the doc straightened and called: "Sergeant, this man says he's got something to say to the one who shot him. He said to tell the fat slob who shot him he wants to talk to him. Those were his words." The doc grinned.

Weigand didn't like that. He looked hard at the doc and he wanted to say something, you could tell. But what could he say? With a snort of disgust he stalked back into the room. He stood over the rolling table where Meade was stretched out on his back.

"What the hell is it?" Weigand demanded, impatiently.

Meade coughed. "If I'd — known it was you, Weigand, I'd — never — have run. I've heard — about you. You — never miss, do you?" He spoke hoarsely, haltingly. His skinny hand clawed toward his throat. "I — I can't talk loud. It — it hurts my throat. Can't you bend

down so I don't have to strain so much? I got one last thing to tell you, sharp-shooter. It — it's important."

Weigand looked him over. He couldn't see any danger. Meade was dying and didn't have strength to hit him or try and grab him or anything. As Meade began to whisper something unintelligible, then, Weigand bent and put his ear close to Meade's mouth, to hear.

We were all watching. We saw Meade's hand move suddenly but the angle of Weigand's head blocked us from seeing what Meade did with that hand. But we saw Weigand straighten like someone had goosed him with a white hot poker. We saw his fat fists pushed against both eyes. He screamed once, a thin, womanish sound that faded in a few moments to a sick whinnying. We all stared, dumbfounded.

We watched Weigand stamp his feet like a kid playing soldier and bend and straighten and then bend again, over and over, while he lurched around the room, bumping into a table and a desk and finally the wall. He leaned against the wall, all bent over and we saw the trickle of blood running down his cheek from under one fist.

The doc ran to Weigand then and forcibly tore the big man's hands away from his face.

"Jesus!" the doc said when he saw Weigand's eyes.

I looked at Danny Meade, then. His right hand was across his chest

and he still had the first two fingers forked, the thumb holding the others out of the way, and I knew what he had done. There was something like a grin on Meade's drawn gray face. He whispered loud enough for all of us to hear: "He won't ever shoot anyone again, will he?"

Weigand didn't hear it, though. We saw he had fainted. The doc ran out into the hall to get help. I walked over to Meade and when I reached him I saw that he was gone, now, for sure. That same expression, the grin, or maybe it was just a death contraction, I don't know, was still on his face. . . .

We waited around until the doc came down from the operating room, some time later. He shook his head. He said: "Meade must've had nails like a Mandarin's. There wasn't much we could do. A specialist might be able to save partial sight, later, but he'll have to wear glasses thick as headlight lenses. He won't be much good as a cop anymore, I'm afraid."

"Hell," Hollenbeck said, then, belatedly. "He never was."

I looked at Hollenbeck. I said: "Kid, does a fine, sensitive young sporting gentleman like you ever think about going out and getting roaring drunk? For emetic purposes, only, of course?"

He didn't look at me but he said: "You're damn well told. Let's get out of here."

And he and I and Smitty, we did that.

BY HAL HARWOOD



Twilight

IT HAPPENED a long, long time ago, but I won't ever forget my father's face that day. It was my thirteenth birthday, and Pa and me were doing the night's chores as always on our little scrap of land

*I'll never forget the way it happened.
I'll remember every detail of that night
as long as I live . . .*

right next to the river bottom. I had slopped the hogs while Pa was milking our one skinny cow, and after bringing hay to the two old plow horses at the barn, we'd be finished.

We had an old wagon we hauled loose hay in, and it was standing about halfway between the house and our old barn. I had just finished pitching hay from the wagon and taking it to the barn when I heard

the first faraway sound. By the time I was back to the wagon and leaning on the long-handled pitchfork, I knew what the sound was. When I turned around, Pa was right beside me, and I saw he had heard it too. Away off in the distance it was, and we both looked across the dusty road in front of our place towards the woods covering the hills.

I didn't say anything, just looked up at Pa. His steady eyes were worried, but his face didn't show anything right then. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with a shirt-sleeve, and ran his big hand through the short hair on my head as he turned to the house. I followed him and wondered just what the trouble was going to be like this time. I was already shaking a little, but I didn't want Pa to know that.

When Pa got to the house, I thought he was going inside and I started in too. But when I went up the steps, he stopped and sat down, reaching up to pull me down alongside him. I sat there shivering a little, not knowing what to expect, and not wanting Pa to know I was scared.

I looked toward the hills again, right into one of the prettiest sunsets I ever saw, and it scared me more. It wasn't long before the sun would go down, but right now it was nesting in soft clouds piled up like white cotton just poured out of a sack. The sun was turning the clouds every color, but all I could see looked like they were filling with

dark red blood and about to burst. I really shivered then, and hugged closer to Pa's knee.

When the baying sounded again, it was much closer. Like it was just over the hill in front of us. The baying came louder, and I could feel Pa stiffen. I did too when I saw what he was looking at across the road. We both stood up as a man broke through the trees and fell in the road, the soft dust clouding up around him till he was covered with it. He raised his head out of the dust to look at the house, and crawled slowly to his feet.

We could hear his breathing from where we stood. Thin and high and ragged, like a winded horse in pain. He staggered across the road then and leaned against the big gate leading into our lot. The dust had powdered his kinky black hair, making it white. His broad black face was streaked with dust and blood from the cuts and scratches of the briars and trees he'd run through. His blue shirt and overalls were torn and splotted dark with heavy sweat. He had only one shoe on, and I could see the ground go red and dark where his one bare foot rested.

As he stood there gulping in big breaths of air, he looked straight at Pa. His thick lips were pulled back from the large white teeth in a fixed grin as if everything was a big joke. The red tongue came out trying to lick the lips, but it had a hard time getting past the teeth. There was a dried, cottony paste on his mouth

and nose, and I could see that he couldn't get his lips together again.

He stood there gazing at Pa and Pa looking at him. As I stared too, I could hear the bloodhounds coming on the other side of the hill. But the man at the gate didn't seem to hear or care. There was fear on his face all right, a sort of little-boy fear like mine. He looked as if he wasn't scared about what he'd done, whatever they were chasing him for, nor what they'd do when they caught him. Just that look of being afraid of something else.

I thought for a second Pa was going into the house, but he didn't. His legs seemed to give out and he sat down again, pulling me down too and placing his arm around my shoulders hard. When Pa sat down, the man shut his eyes and turned his head away, then opened the gate.

He stumbled into the lot and fell, but crawled up again and finally reached the wagon. He hung on the wagon and turned to look at the woods. His black face fell over sideways as he listened, and I could see that he was crying. As the baying of the hounds came louder and louder, he pulled up and over the side of the wagon and burrowed down in the loose hay.

When my scared eyes came back to Pa, I could see his face was bunched and hard, and there was a muscle thumping in the side of his neck. His eyes were sad and far-away, looking through the wagon and barn and clear to the river.

We both jumped and turned to the road again when the first bloodhound came through the trees. He was big and ugly, with dripping jaws and red eyes that looked mean. There was a short piece of chain fastened to his collar and he was pulling a skinny little man along behind him. The man was tired and acted meaner than the dog as he jerked hard on the chain to slow the dog down.

Another hound and chain and man came through the trees on the heels of the first. They looked about like the first two, except the second man was having more trouble holding his dog. They both managed to haul the hounds down into the dirt of the road as they reached it, and there waited and rested, staring across the road at us.

Behind them five men came out of the woods spread out in a line and about ten yards apart. They stared at the two men and their dogs in the road, and then at Pa and me sitting on our front step. I recognized three of them as farmers, and one as the blacksmith who worked in a shed next the general store. The other man leading them was the storeowner.

The storeowner glared at Pa and me for a long minute, and I could feel Pa's hand tighten on my shoulder to stop my trembling. All the men had shotguns ready in their hands as they went over to where the dogs were struggling in the dust on their chains. The men stood there

whispering and looking at the house and the barn. Finally, the storeowner said something in a low voice to the two hound men, and they started again, with the hounds scrambling to the gate.

Both bloodhounds clawed hard through the gate, barely stopping at the dark wet spot in the dirt. They pulled harder as they came to the wagon, and low, rumbling moans slobbered from their dripping jaws. When the dogs reached the wagon, both of them tried to climb up the side and were jerked back. Their deep bellowing cries were making such a racket now that it was hard to hear anything.

One of the farmers laid his gun on the ground and picked up the pitchfork that I'd dropped by the wagon. He stepped up on one of the wheels and plunged the fork into the hay, up and down as hard as he could. After stabbing three or four times, he hit something and jumped off the wheel, leaving the pitchfork standing straight and quivering in the wagon. The black man hidden in the hay jumped up, throwing the hay in every direction, with the fork stuck right through his middle.

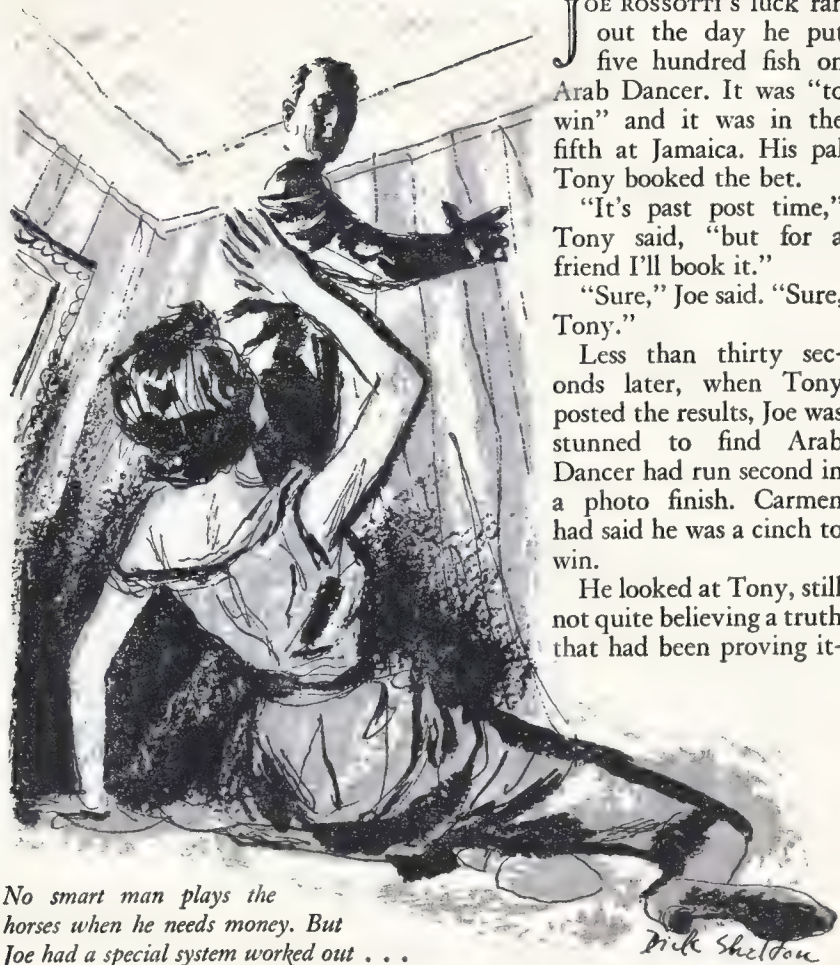
He stood there with his long arms stretched to the sky, paying no attention to the men and the guns pointed at him. His streaked bloody face reached for the heavens too, and I stared at the warm, rosy glow that bathed it. For just a tiny beat of time there was a fearsome quiet. Even the snarling dogs were still.

"Oh, Lord . . ." the black man called, and then the shotguns drowned him out. The heavy blasts shook Pa and me where we sat on the steps, their ugly red voices cutting through the deep purple of the twilight. Pa pulled my head down on his chest, but my eyes stayed on the black man swaying in the wagon. I saw one of the stretching hands disappear and a shredded stub take its place. The shining, reaching face turned into a red mush, and two big holes spilled out on his straining body. Then the dead man fell out of the wagon into the dirt of the lot, and it was quiet again.

The men watched as the dirt around the body got darker and wetter, then they turned quickly to the gate. When they all had gone through, one of them very carefully closed and latched it. Pulling the hounds with them, they crossed the dirt road, with never a look at Pa and me, and entered the woods again.

When they were gone at last, I was sobbing in big hard gulps as I turned to look at Pa. He was still staring toward the wagon, and I'd never seen a face grabbed with so much pain. It was all there for me to see and understand, and I sat there and was sick with the understanding.

I don't know why, but after awhile I had sort of a proud feeling when I looked at Pa, and then it didn't hurt so bad to go out in the dirt of the lot to help him pick up the body of my brother.



No smart man plays the horses when he needs money. But Joe had a special system worked out . . .

Dick Shelton

For a Friend

BY
BOB
McKNIGHT

self to him for weeks. Hell, you don't get to suspect a lifetime pal overnight, or the girl you want, either.

Still, Tony didn't believe in giving a sucker an even break, and he'd been a sharp operator ever since they were kids. Tony had always had money in his pocket even when they were in grade school.

Now Tony was the neighborhood bigshot, bigger than Lew Kronig, the loan shark, one of the six-for-five boys that made a fine art out of collection. They'd all three been kids together, but kids grew up fast in the neighborhood. Joe was the honest one, by neighborhood standards.

Joe began to think of the day he'd propositioned Carmen. She hadn't rejected it. She'd made a counter-proposition.

"See me when you got at least a thousand, Joe," she'd said. "You'll need that much if we're going to have ourselves a time."

All he could see was the full ripeness of her lovely body, the earthy passion that was there for the guy who could afford it.

Joe wasn't a fast thinker like Tony and Lew, but he didn't have to have it spelled out for him that a lush beauty like Carmen wouldn't wait. He couldn't wait, either.

"What am I supposed to do, make with a stick-up or something?" he said.

Her big black eyes sparkled.

"You got five C's," she said. "You heard of horses, haven't you?"

"Yeah," he said, "but you've got to be on the inside."

She put her hands on her well rounded hips, drew her shoulders back to emphasize her richly endowed equipment. He knew then he was going to invest his dough on a horse, any horse she wanted to suggest.

"I hear things," she said. "Maybe there'll be something going tomorrow. Meet me in front of Tony's."

"Tony's my friend."

Carmen's temper blazed.

"If you change your mind, meet me like I said."

She had turned away from him then, swinging her hips, and as he watched he knew he'd be in front of Tony's.

Carmen was gone when he went outside, and he knew for sure then she and Tony had played him for a patsy. At first, the hot Sicilian blood of his ancestors had made him think of murder, but a guy would have to be nuts to destroy that lovely body. Besides, he still wanted her.

It took him all night, in his slow thinking way, to figure out a caper that he was sure would work. Even so, it didn't crystallize until Marty Shanagher told him Carmen had moved into Tony's apartment.

There was only one thing wrong with the plan. He didn't have any money, and he knew Tony wouldn't accept his marker.

He'd have to have cash. There was only one possibility, Lew Kronig, the loan shark.

Lew's Pawn Shop was on Third Avenue. Joe went there, hardly noticed the broken-shoe bums he passed along the way, but carefully looking over the slack-clad girls that disgorged from a second floor furrier's sweat shop.

He found Lew inside the steel-mesh cage in the back of the shop, a watchmaker's glass in his eye. He was inspecting a large stone which Joe figured would be a hot diamond.

Lew took the glass out of his eye, looked at Joe.

"What's on your mind?" Lew said.

Funny he'd never noticed before what a tough-looking mug Lew was. You know a guy all your life and don't think much about his looks until you have to do business with him. Then he looks like all the other loan sharks, only worse.

"I need five C's," Joe said.

Lew watched him.

"What you got to sell?" he said.

"Nothing'. I got nothin' to sell. I just need five hundred bucks."

Lew shrugged.

"A week," he said. "I get six hundred back."

Lew counted out the money.

"Don't make me come and collect it," he said.

Joe went to Angelo's Barber Shop at two o'clock. Angelo's was just two doors down the street from Tony's horse parlor, and Ears Mulcahey

ran a small hand-book in the back room.

The small, smoke-filled room was crowded, and Joe eased into a corner where he wouldn't be noticed, but where he could see the results board.

He sweated out race after race, chain-smoking, fidgeting, thinking of how he was going to get even with Tony and Carmen, if the right deal would only come up.

Finally, Ears was writing up the 7th at Jamaica. Joe held his breath.

A longshot by the name of Miss X had won the heat. The favorite, Rembrandt, had wound up in the three hole. This was it. Joe waited only long enough to get the place pay-off on Miss X. She'd paid \$46.30 to win, and \$20.20 to place.

Joe scrambled out of there and ran the two doors down the street to Tony's. He had his dollar watch in his hand as he entered. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the 7th at Jamaica wasn't chalked up yet on Tony's blackboard. As usual, Tony was waiting for the late sucker money. Tony knew the result already, but would take late bets on anything, to win, except Miss X. If anybody asked for that one, he'd say it was too late.

"Hey, Tony," Joe said, "am I in time to lay a hundred on Rembrandt's nose?"

He made it loud so all the other players would be sure to hear.

Tony looked at the electric clock.

"That lousy watch of yours is slow again, but, for a friend, okay."

"Thanks, Tony," Joe said. Then he paused and added, "And gimme four hundred to place on Miss X."

The color drained from Tony's face. Rage showed in the white line around his lips, but he couldn't renege. He was stuck with it. Welshers didn't last long in the neighborhood.

When he wrote up the result of the 7th at Jamaica a moment later, Joe saw that his hand shook, especially when he wrote \$20.20 for the place on Miss X.

Tony paid Joe \$4,040, but his eyes were mean slits.

"You wouldn't be pullin' a fast one, would you, Pal?" he said.

"Naw," Joe said. "I wouldn't even know which end of a horse eats. You remember who picked Arab Dancer for me, dontcha?"

"Yeah," Tony said. "Yeah!"

"Well," Joe said. "See you around, pal."

He walked out of Tony's and headed east. He knew where Tony's apartment was, and he knew about

the drug store on the corner. You could see the apartment house entrance from there. He hurried there and waited by the telephone booth.

He didn't have long to wait before Tony's flashy convertible slammed to the curb in front of the apartment, and Tony erupted from it. He raced up the stone steps, and flung the door back with a loud crash as he entered the building.

Joe dropped a coin in the telephone slot, and dialed the police. When he got his connection, he asked for the riot detail.

"Yeah?"

"A dame's getting the hell beat out of her," Joe said. He gave the address and the apartment number. "Better hurry."

He hung up, looked at his dollar watch, and grinned. He'd go pay Lew the six C's. Then he'd pick Carmen up at the police station. He could afford her now.

She'd be marked up some, but hell, that wouldn't hurt nothing.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Time to Practise

In Los Angeles recently, Vernon Bronson Twitchell had the unique opportunity of studying his own book behind bars. The author of *Living Without Liquor*, Twitchell began a 60-day sentence for drunken driving. Police said it was the 32nd time he had been arrested for drunkenness.

Squealer

Washington, D. C. police, tracking a \$650 robbery, visited the home of James Morgan to question him. Vehemently he denied all knowledge of the money. The police were just leaving when the tea kettle began to whistle. An alert officer lifted the lid — and found the stolen money floating on the boiling water.

Repeater

In Pittsburgh, Pa., Morris Lebovitz lost a 1953 Cadillac by theft. Eventually, tired of being car-less, he bought a 1954 model. Several days later the new car was stolen, and the old, in excellent condition, was left in its place.

This time police found the culprit, Clarence Bailey, 26, who had stolen both cars.

He was sentenced to two to six years in the penitentiary.

Matrimoanial Antics

In Los Angeles a man arrested for marrying four separate females in less than twelve months declared aggrievedly: "I had to have something to do on my days off!"

In Knoxville, Tenn., a husband sued for divorce on the grounds that his wife wrote a song entitled *Thirty Months in Hell* just to describe their marriage.

While in Hartford, Conn., police entered a restaurant to arrest for non-support a part-time piano player, Paul H. Scott, 34, and found him playing his heart out. The song he was beating out on the ivories was *I Wish I Was Single Again!*

Bargain

Harvey Thompson, waiter at *The Barbecue Pit* in Dallas, Tex., knows a good offer when he gets it. Threatened by a holdup man who gave him a note reading, "Give me forty dollars. If you don't have forty, give me ten," Thompson handed over \$10 and kept the change.

Willing Victim

A Nashville, Tenn. newspaper printed a letter from a convict aged 21, serving five years for robbery, who declared that he was anxious to marry "any widow, regardless of age, so long as she has enough money to educate me and knows the gov-

ernor well enough to get me a pardon."

Futility

Atlanta, Ga. burglars, escaping with a safe containing \$5000 from a supermarket, successfully loaded it onto their truck. But as they drove off, the safe slid down onto the pavement where it remained for the police.

Imitation Rigor Mortis

A suicide using a gun may unintentionally mimic *rigor mortis* in the fingers only — provided he keeps a tight hold on the revolver. For some unknown reason a cadaveric spasm may occur which makes the hand stiffen tenaciously onto the weapon, while the rest of his body remains limp. Normal *rigor mortis*, affecting the entire body, will not reach the hands for at least two hours after death.

Blue Law Bandit

A grocer in Yuma, Ariz. is being forced to close his store on Sundays against his will. Twice a masked robber has taken \$6000 from store owner George Spurling. Each time the bandit, operating on week days only, tells Spurling the robberies will continue "as long as you stay open Sundays."

Fragrant Hideout

Another grocery store in the Southwest, this time in Dallas, Tex., was found by several squad cars

answering an alarm to have its back door wide open. After a fruitless search of the place, officers were about to leave when Police Sgt. Ted Cain and Detective T. T. Lord lifted the lid of a garbage can. Crouched moistly inside was the 19-year-old burglar.

Friendly Custom

Police in Knoxville, Tenn., were instructed by Mayor George Dempster never to swear when making arrests. "A man," the mayor told them, "ought to reserve profanity for his friends and not just spread it around."

Sleepytime Boys

In Seattle, Wash., a frustrated citizen trying to guard against burglars reported to police that he locked and bolted his door, hid \$40 in his sock, and wore the sock to bed. In the morning the sock was still on his foot, but the \$40 was gone.

Gerald Blanchard, of Marinette, Wis., confessed to police in Marquette, Mich. a unique method of picking his hotel robbery victims. Blanchard, a beauty shop supply salesman, listens for snores. There's a certain rhythm, he insists, that makes it safe to enter for an over-haul of billfolds and purses.

And in Inverness, Calif., Vadim Turkan fastened the doors of his grocery with heavy chains and went to bed in the back room. Neighbors were awakened when burglars took

off the chains and fled with 19 cases of beer before the police arrived. Turkan slept on.

Monkey Business

Officers Johnny Coles and Jim Harp of Tulsa, Okla., arrested M. L. Sharp for illegal possession of whiskey, then couldn't find the liquor in the house. But a search of the back yard revealed a pet monkey in an old chicken coop, playing with a full half pint. Near him were 16 more pints.

"That damned monkey," Sharp groaned. "Last week he broke 12 bottles."

Female of the Species

An odd "crime" occurred in Liege, Belgium, one afternoon in January, 1911, when Auguste Clemond, wealthy widower, summoned police after the death of his only daughter, Marie. She had been engaged to a law clerk, Raymond Hamelle, but was fiercely jealous of his affection for her more attractive cousin, Jeanne.

Several nights before her death, Hamelle had promised to come to discuss wedding details, but when he failed to arrive by 9 P.M., Marie dashed furiously out into the storm. Two hours later she returned soaked and shivering. Pneumonia set in, and as the end drew near, her father sent for Hamelle. Until three in the morning the young man watched beside her bed, then told M. Cle-

mond that Marie had sent him away, asking her father to come instead. Alone with her parent, Marie, barely able to whisper, told him just before she died that Hamelle had opened her jewel case and stolen a diamond.

Investigation revealed that Hamelle had courted Jeanne until won over by Marie's money and her vigorous pursuit. Jeanne swore that although Hamelle had not seen her since the engagement, Marie was mad with jealousy and constantly spied on her. It was also revealed that Jeanne was next of kin since her cousin's death, and under the will of Marie's grandfather would inherit the family property. Marie had died suddenly. Was it possible, police wondered, that Hamelle was guilty of murder as well as theft?

An autopsy gave the answer. Contents of the viscera revealed not a trace of poison — but within Marie's stomach was the missing 7-carat diamond, swallowed in a death-bed revenge by the jealous girl.

An Ounce of Prevention

In Dallas, Tex., arresting a man who had slugged his wife with a sledge hammer, police learned from him that she "always got cranky" when the weather was bad. So, fearing another twister because of a threatening sky, he told them he had forestalled a scene by bopping her over the head and sending her to the hospital.

MENACE

I didn't see Garr walking across the dance floor, didn't see him until he grabbed Paul Hershey's tie in his big right hand. His fist couldn't have moved more than six inches, because he never let go of the tie, but he clipped Hershey on the chin and let him dangle at the tie's end for a moment, then dropped him.

I moved fast, but not fast enough. It took me a second to reach Hershey and when I'd gotten to him I spun around at a loud crash behind me. Garr was leaving the dance floor and heading for the swinging doors leading into the kitchen. A table he'd banged into or flipped over rolled on the floor and the crash still echoed in the room, incongruous and completely out of place here like a burp between sweet nothings. I ran toward the kitchen, hit the swinging doors and skidded to a stop inside.

I grabbed a passing chef and pointed toward the alley. "He go outside?"

"Yes."

I ran out behind the club as tires shrieked and a car motor roared. A light blue Packard sedan raced to the alley's end, across the street and on down the alley.

I went back inside the club. Paul Hershey wasn't in sight.

Nobody was dancing. Two waiters and several customers stared at me. Or rather at my chest. I looked down. My shoulder harness and the butt of my .38 Colt Special were startling against the white of my shirt. The gun was halfway out of its holster. It seemed a good thing; I might be needing it.

That's Shell Scott talking, and Shell's gotten himself mixed up with a Senator, a few assorted gangsters, a crowd of lovely women and a shooting or two, in Richard S. Prather's *Blood Ballot*, a complete novel featured in our new companion magazine, *Menace*, now on your newsstands. But a new Shell Scott novel isn't the only attraction of *Menace* — there are also brand-new exciting novelettes by Frank Ward and *Manhunt* favorite Fletcher Flora, and short stories by Hal Ellson, Richard Deming, Jack Webb and others.

If you like *Manhunt*, you're sure to like *Menace* too. Pick up a copy at your local newsstand — before our extra-large first printing is sold out completely!

I DROVE the stolen Ford back into Santa Caralita; and when I came to an outdoor phone booth in a service station that was closed for the night, I stopped and called Julie.

There was the chance, of course, that the police had tapped Julie's phone; but it was a chance I had to take. And after forty-eight hours without food or sleep, I was too tired

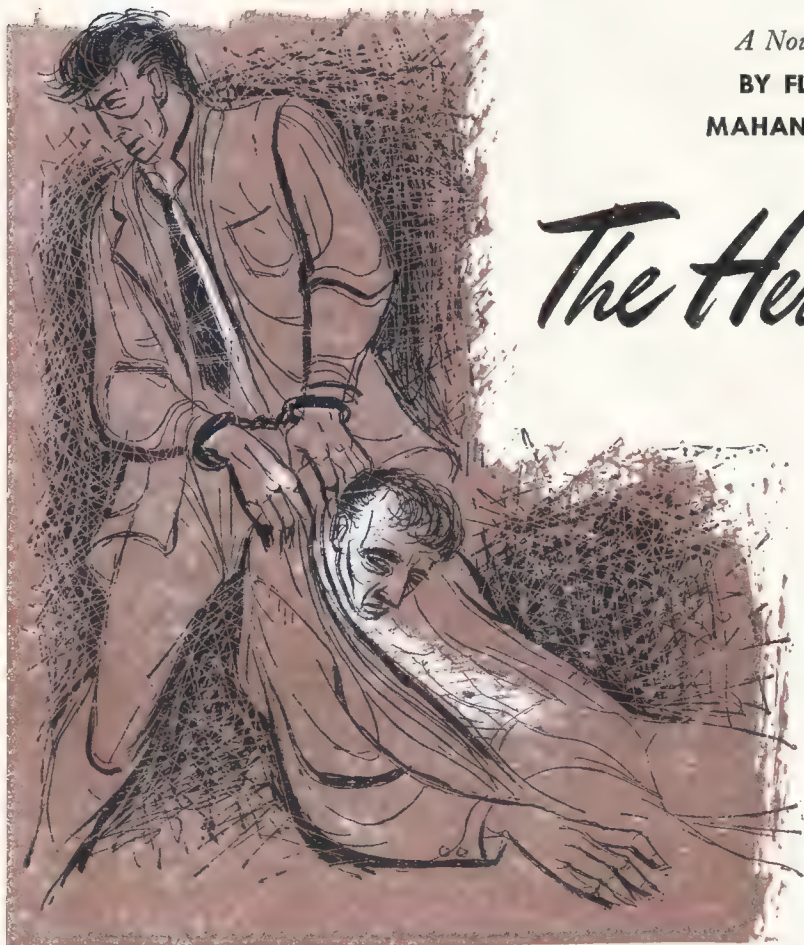
*Mel had been framed once, and now he was out of jail.
But somebody was trying to frame him again . . .*

A Novelette

BY FLOYD

MAHANNAH

The Hero



to care much one way or the other. I knew this last, forlorn scheme of mine had less than a prayer of working, but you have to play out your hand.

"Hello?" It was Julie's voice.

"It's Mel."

I could hear the sharp intake of her breath, then the break in her voice: "Mel — where are you?"

"No matter. Julie, I want you to do something for me."

"Mel, you've got to give yourself up. They're hunting you — with guns — I've been so scared." She sounded close to tears. "Mel, why did you do it?"

"I didn't kill Vince Dobleen. You've got to believe that."

"Then who —"

"I don't know who. There's a chance, a very long chance, that I can find out. If you'll help me."

"I'll do anything for you, Mel."

"I want you to get in your car, drive out Twelfth Street to the park, make the loop around the lake, then go straight back to your apartment. That's all there is to it."

"But how will that help you?"

"No time to explain. Just do exactly what I said. Start in twenty minutes."

"All right." Tears were in her voice now. "Mel —"

"Yes?"

"I love you. Please take care of yourself."

"Sure, kid."

I waited until I heard her hang up, I jiggled the hook like I'd hung

up too, then I waited, listening. After a while there was a click, but I don't know enough about wire tapping to tell if it meant anything or not. I hung up.

I sat there a little longer, very tired, not thinking of anything but Julie now. I remembered how the dark hair framed her face — her face with its clear, unmarked quality that made her seem so young. It was a dark-eyed, full lipped, snub-nosed face that was on the edge of being plain, until she smiled. When she smiled, she was beautiful — it was as if somewhere in her a light started to shine, and the warmth and happiness of it came from her to you.

And she loved me. I think that's all that kept me from going crazy those two long years in prison. And it was all that kept me from running away now.

I drove the Ford to within a block of the park, left it beside a big apartment house where it wouldn't attract attention, then I walked the rest of the way to the park. At the entrance was a four-way boulevard stop, and a big overhead light. It was late at night, with very little traffic — none at all right now. I crossed the street and slipped into the shelter of the thick shrubbery and eucalyptus trees.

Fog drifted thinly past on a cold breeze setting in from the ocean. The surf was a faint, faraway boom not as loud as the brittle sound of the breeze in the eucalyptus leaves.

The fog condensed on the leaves, and the cold drops fell on the back of my neck.

For the time, there was nothing to do but wait. Wait, and remember back to last Sunday and the picnic with Julie. It was the third day after my release from prison . . .

"Julie, I can't do it. If I even go near that guy, there's no telling what might happen. If you knew how many times I've dreamed of strangling him with my bare hands —"

"Mel, he's changed."

"Well, I haven't."

"He visited me several times while you were — away. I believe he is sincere. He wants to make it up to you some way. Help you get a new start."

I guess my laugh was bitter.

"Please, Mel." Her face had that earnest, puckered look it gets when she wants something very much. "He has changed a lot. He does a lot of charity work, spends a great deal of his time down at the Rescue Mission — you know, where they work to rehabilitate men who are down —"

"I'm not a charity case, baby."

"I didn't mean that. I'm trying to make you see how Vince Dobleen has changed."

"Listen, that's the guy who sent me to prison. Maybe he has got religion, but I can't forget what he did to me. You can't hate a guy the way I have, and as long as I have, then

just —" I shut it off, made myself smile at her. "Heck, we're spoiling the picnic. Forget Vince Dobleen. I'll get a job all right, then you and me —"

2.

Well, maybe you remember me now — Mel Karger. Mel Karger, the guy who brought home all the medals, who shot down all the enemy planes, the guy they gave the parade and the keys of the city to. Mel Karger, the guy Vince Dobleen turned into the prize chump of the century.

Don't ask me how he worked it, because I never knew.

All I know is he was promoting a real estate development, low cost housing, that looked good. I sunk all my cash into it; and somehow I wound up as general manager, where I had no business being at all, because I know next to nothing about that end of it. Selling is my line; and with all that war hero publicity I was getting, I was a natural — I pulled money into the deal that ordinarily wouldn't have touched it with a forty-foot pole.

As a salesman I was hot, but as general manager I somehow always turned out doing what Vince Dobleen advised me to. He showed me how to handle things, what to do, what to sign — brother, how I did sign things.

For a while I was a big shot riding around in a new Cadillac; and the

next thing I knew I was in a courtroom watching the prosecution parade all those signatures before a jury, and demanding to know what I'd done with the money.

In the end, even my own attorney believed I was guilty.

Dobleen? He came through without a scratch. He came through with all my money, and God knows how much money belonging to the other sheep I'd led to the shearing.

I remembered that last day in court, with me being led away, yelling I'd get him if it was the last thing I ever did. I remembered that, and the cold shiver that ran through me now wasn't just the cold wind and the drops of water falling on the back of my neck.

And now I could hear his voice on the phone two nights ago: "Don't hang up on me, Mel, until you hear what I say. I can't make up all the money you lost on that deal—I haven't got that much myself—but I would like to pay back enough of it to give you another start. Say twenty thousand dollars?"

I was too astonished even to answer him.

"Mel? You still there?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you say? Can you come over to my place tonight and talk it over?"

"I guess so." He'd knocked the wind out of my sails completely. Maybe the guy had gotten religion.

"Fine. Make it nine o'clock sharp?"

"I'll be there."

Vince Dobleen lived in a big, beautifully landscaped, Spanish style place that overlooked the ocean. There were lights behind the curtains when I got there; and, figuring he was home, I paid off the cab driver. I walked up the flagstoned path that curved through the shrubs and trees, and I rang the doorbell.

And nobody answered.

I rang and waited three more times without answer. Evidently he hadn't called from the house, and he wasn't home yet. I waited more than half an hour, and there was no doubt now that something had come up to delay him. I'd call him again tomorrow. I gave the bell one last ring, in case he'd been asleep or something; then for the first time I gave the doorknob a try. It turned and the door opened to my push.

I hesitated. Should I go in and wait a while longer?

I leaned inside. "Dobleen? Anybody home?"

There was no sound except the roll of the ocean against the cliff back of the house. I stepped into the entry hall, which was dark except for reflected light from the living room. "Dobleen?" I walked into the living room, and it was empty. The door to the library was closed, and it was barely possible he had fallen asleep in there and not heard the bell.

I opened the door. I looked inside and my heart seemed to stop cold inside my chest. I stared, and I couldn't move, I couldn't even

breathe. Then suddenly my stomach seemed to turn a somersault, I turned and I ran. I made it to the front door, then I got sick.

3.

Listen, he'd been lying there on his stomach, a small, slender, silver haired figure in a tweed suit, with both hands under him, his face turned toward me. Only it wasn't a face any more. Somebody had fired God knows how many bullets into it at point-blank range; and — what with the bullet holes, the blood, and the powder burns — it wasn't anything like a face, it was just a red ruin.

For a while I just stood outside, sick, then it began to come to me — the kind of jam this put me in — and I began to get scared.

That was Vince Dobleen, the guy who'd sent me to prison. That was the guy I'd sworn to get. I had reason to kill him, the cab driver would remember bringing me here, I had no alibi for the last half hour. I thought of all that, and for a second I was on the verge of running; then I went back into the house.

There was a gallon can of gasoline near the body on the red tiled floor. Some of it had been sprinkled on the body and around it, and a lot more was on the piled papers and drapes spotted around the base of the panelled wall, as if the killer had been interrupted in the act of setting

fire to the house to conceal his crime.

The whole library was a mess — desk drawers open, papers and books littering the floor, the big wall safe open and empty.

Call the cops? I threw that idea away instantly. This murder fitted me like a glove. I forced myself to feel the body, and it was almost as warm as my own. That meant he'd probably been killed only minutes before I'd arrived. That put me on the scene of the crime at the right time with the right motive and a record of having threatened to murder him. The cops wouldn't have to look twice to decide who *had* murdered him.

The killer — where was he? If I'd interrupted him in the act of setting fire to the place, where had he gone? He sure hadn't passed me out front. He could be still in the house.

I checked every room. Sure, I was scared — any door I opened might mean I'd get what Dobleen got, but I opened them all. And they were all empty. In the garage, joined onto the house, there were two cars, a Ford and a Cadillac. But no killer. Then I found the back door open, and I realized my arrival must have driven him out the back.

And by now I knew what I was going to do — the only thing that was left to do. Run.

I had twenty dollars in my pocket and that's all. I had to turn Vince Dobleen's body over to get to his wallet, and I couldn't help noticing

how his hands were pressed flat and tight against his stomach — why, I don't know, because he hadn't been shot there.

There was a hundred and eighty dollars in the wallet.

And now I needed a car.

I took the Ford, because it'd attract less attention. I drove it out, closed the garage door, then I got out of there in a hurry.

4.

I drove about a dozen blocks before I spotted the car following me. It looked like a big car, but that's all I could tell with the headlights in my eyes. I made a couple of turns which were duplicated, and I knew for sure I was being tailed. Police? Then why didn't they close in? I thought of trying to outrun them, but suppose it wasn't the police? And that's when I had a sudden hunch.

I stomped on the gas, stretched my lead out to more than a block before the other car started to close up again; then I skidded the Ford into a dark side street, hit the brakes, dove into the first driveway I came to, and cut the lights.

The other car came around the corner moments later, braked sharply as the driver saw the dark, empty street, and came almost to a stop. It was a Cadillac.

I gunned the Ford back into the street, shifted, gave the motor all it'd take; and in seconds I'd crowded

in on the Cadillac, jamming on my brakes as fenders crashed and the bigger car was pinned against the curb. I was out and running the instant the Ford stopped; but the other driver was too fast for me. And he didn't try to back up and circle the Ford; he poured on the gas, and that Cadillac's big motor humped it right up over the curb. It skidded across a lawn, just missed a tree, gouged huge holes in a flowerbed without getting stuck, then was back in the street, roaring away.

I'd killed the Ford's engine when I stopped, and now I flooded it. The starter ground for what seemed minutes — lights were popping on all over the neighborhood — then finally it caught, and I roared out of there myself.

The Cadillac had gotten away clean. But I'd gotten a good look at it — it was black, it had white sidewalled tires, and from the back fender rose the kind of antenna they have when there is a mobile telephone in the car — *it was the Cadillac that had been in Vince Doble's garage.*

The killer must have been hidden in the gardens back of the house. When I left, he'd jumped into the Cadillac and followed me. Why, I couldn't make the remotest guess. But I'd been so close to trapping him; if I'd only rammed him instead of — no use thinking about that.

I was ten miles out of town on a highway that would take me clear

to New York if I stayed on it long enough, before something occurred to me.

This Ford, Vince Dobleen was the kind of guy who always put up a big front, he wanted the best of everything; and so far as I knew, he never drove anything but a Cadillac. I thought about that until finally I pulled into a side road between a couple of apple orchards, and switched on the interior light to look at the registration slip on the steering post.

It was registered to Joseph T. Rogers, 6127 Purfoy Road, Santa Caralita, California.

This wasn't Dobleen's car at all. Then what had it been doing in his garage with the keys in it? Could it be the killer's car? I could feel the excitement coming up in me now. That would explain his following me.

I looked in the glove compartment and there was a flashlight, a pack of cigarettes, and an almost full box of .38 cartridges. I turned and looked in the back seat, and there was a tan pigskin brief case there. I opened it, looked, and my hands started to shake.

Listen, it looked like half the money in the world in there. My hands were shaking so badly I could hardly count it. If the figures written on the bands were correct, I had just under a quarter of a million bucks stacked on the front seat beside me.

"God Almighty!" I breathed.

Brother, I knew why Dobleen had been killed now. And I knew why the killer had trailed me. And I also knew the only reason I was still alive — the killer had given Dobleen the full clip in his face, and the gun had been empty when I walked in.

For a few seconds I felt good. I was off the hook, and Joseph T. Rogers was on. Then a thought chilled me. Suppose the car was stolen. Sure, I could hand over the money, but the cops might say that I'd just tried a clever move to make it look like I hadn't killed Dobleen; and I'd be right back where I started.

I thought about that a long time before I started the car and drove back to Santa Caralita.

5.

6127 Purfoy Road was on the beach, well out of the settled part of town, a lonely place where sand dunes hid all signs of neighbors, and the surf broke thunderously. In the blowing fog I could tell little about the house except that it was shabby and there were no lights in it.

I hesitated — if Rogers was the killer, he might be in there, and this time the gun might be loaded. But there was no car in front of the house. Finally I walked onto the rickety porch and knocked.

Nobody answered. I walked around the house and the windows were shut and fastened. I tried the

back door, and it gave a little, like it might be held only by a flimsy bolt. I hesitated again, then I put my shoulder against it, and it opened with a mild complaint of screws pulling out of old wood. I stepped in then something stopped me stock still. The smell of boiling coffee.

And in the same instant a switch clicked, a ceiling light blinded me, then something socked me hard on the back of my head.

I was on my knees, staring stupidly at dirty linoleum; then this shadow moved on it, and I barely had sense enough to roll my head before another blow smashed into my neck muscles, half paralyzing my right shoulder and arm.

You never know where your strength comes from at a time like that. I guess it was instinct that made me somersault forward, twisting as I rolled, so that I wound up on my back with my feet between me and whoever was slugging me. The guy, his shape enormous against the ceiling light, was driving in again; but my feet caught him in the chest, driving him back and right up onto the top of the stove, yelling as the scalding coffee slopped on him.

I guess it was the coffee and the hot burner that gave me my chance. For a couple of seconds he wasn't fighting anything but the coffee and the stove; and in that time I grabbed a foot, twisted with all my strength, and he rolled off the stove to land on his face. I dropped my knees into the small of his back, clubbed him

at the base of the skull with my fist, and he went limp under me.

I rolled him over.

He was a big man, bigger than me, and he wore slacks and a sweater. He had sandy crew-cut hair and a big jaw; and the scar tissue around his eyes, the bent nose, crumpled ears all said he must have been a boxer at one time. But was he Joseph T. Rogers?

I rolled him back on his face, took the billfold out of his back pocket, and opened it. I looked and almost dropped it. The picture looking back at me from the I.D. card was his, and the card stated that he was Sergeant Chad Vednick, Santa Caralita Police.

Had he been staked out here, waiting for Rogers? No, they wouldn't stake out just one man to catch a murderer. Besides it was hardly possible that Rogers had left any clues that would bring the police so directly to this place. It might be that Rogers was in some other trouble, but I sure wasn't going to wait around to ask this cop.

I was a fool to hang around any longer. The only way to beat the jam I was in was to run and keep on running. With all that money I had a chance, if I could just get some distance between me and Santa Caralita. Vednick was stirring as I walked out.

By the time I was five miles inland, the fog had cleared, and that's all that saved me. I came over a little rise, and half a mile ahead I

could see all the red lights and stopped cars. I'd waited too long. Now the roadblocks were up.

I cut the lights, took the first side road I came to, followed it through the orchards and vineyards, up into the hills, and to road's end against the mountains where a small stream ran through a thick stand of second-growth redwoods.

This was the end of the road. In every way. I cut the motor and just sat there. There was nothing else to do.

6.

I was there two days and two nights. Once some kids wandered up the stream, shooting at birds with an air rifle; a couple of parties of picnickers showed up, but nobody paid me much attention.

It seemed like all the will to move had run out of me. I just stayed there in the redwoods where the road ended and listened to the radio as the busy police wove the web around me.

The killer had dropped a match in the library as he ran through the house to jump into the Cadillac and follow me, but the fire was spotted in a matter of minutes by a passing motorist, and the fire department got there before the body was badly charred. Dobleen's appointment pad had escaped the fire; and the notation there, "Mel Karger, 9:00 P.M." plus an alert police officer who remembered my trial and threat two

years ago, plus a quick check at my apartment, were what had gotten the roadblocks up so fast. The cab driver's identification, and my fingerprints all around sewed the case up tight. I was guilty.

With the body badly charred and the face ruined, only his fingerprints identified Dobleen. His hands, under the body, had escaped the fire; and there was no question of identification. Dobleen had been arrested a couple of days earlier on a felony drunk driving charge, and booked and fingerprinted. He'd been out on bail.

And that wasn't all the trouble he'd been in. The Treasury Department had an income tax evasion charge pending. And on the second day an elderly widow demanded an accounting of a hundred thousand dollars she'd given him to invest. Seemed like Dobleen's troubles had come all at once, climaxing in his death. Anyway, that accounted for the quarter of a million bucks that Dobleen wasn't trusting to banks.

Julie was picked up for questioning and released. The murder gun had not been found. Joseph T. Rogers' name was never mentioned. The Cadillac had been found—presumably abandoned by me.

Sergeant Chad Vednick's slugging was not mentioned.

So far as I could see, I held only one trump. The money. Now that they had it settled I was the killer, the real killer might be sitting tight instead of running. Only he knew I

had the money; and he might be greedy enough to risk trying to find me before the police did — he had one advantage over the cops: he knew I was driving a gray Ford, license 1G80838. His best bet would be to watch Julie, hoping I'd contact her. Then he might make a try for the money. Unless the police were also trailing Julie.

That's how slim my chances were.

And that's what I was doing hiding there among the shrubs, while the wind rattled the eucalyptus leaves above me, and the cold drops fell on me. One thing I had done: I'd buried the brief case at the foot of a redwood tree before I started out. The killer would never get that.

And finally Julie's blue coupe came into sight, made the stop, passed less than fifteen feet from where I was hidden. Her eyes were front, her face showing the strain she'd been under these two days. It was all I could do not to call to her as she passed.

And, when she was half a block away, another car made the stop. It was a black Chevrolet sedan, and the man in it was Sergeant Chad Vednick in plain clothes.

Him again. Out of fifty cops on the force, it had to be him again. And didn't he ever work with a partner? I thought all cops worked in pairs. Then a thought hit me, a thought so crazy I'd have pushed it out of my mind but it wouldn't go.

Chad Vednick alone on Julie's trail. Chad Vednick alone in Rogers'

house. Who had arrested Dobleen for drunk driving — Chad Vednick? It was crazy, but just suppose Dobleen, dead drunk or asleep had babbled about all the dough in his house; suppose Vednick had gone there two nights later, forced him to open the safe, then shot him dead; suppose I had lifted the dough right out from under him, he'd gambled on me checking Rogers' house before I ran . . .

It was fantastic, but so was everything else about this mess. And what did I have to lose now?

7.

Ten minutes later, I drove the Ford slowly past Julie's apartment, spotted Vednick's sedan, and drove past it, my face turned away from him. It was dark and foggy, and he wouldn't spot my face; but if he spotted this gray Ford, that would mean something. And what it would mean was enough to send a prickle of excitement through me.

I drove on, watching my rear view mirror, and *there!* He'd grabbed the bait. He was coming after me, coming fast; then his sedan cut in front of me, tires squealing, crowding me to the curb.

"Come out of there, Karger," he barked, gun levelled at me.

I came out, eyes on the gun, set to start yelling for help, to make so big a disturbance I'd get the whole neighborhood out here, and somebody would call the cops before

Vednick could get me into a car and take me some place where he could beat the money's location out of me. And not until that instant did I see the flaw in the whole crazy stack of suppositions I'd built up.

Vednick wasn't the killer. If it'd been Vednick in the Cadillac the other night, he wouldn't have run away. He'd have pulled that gun on me, and I'd have done what he said; then when he was close enough, he'd have slugged me with it, dumped me into the Ford, driven out of town, reloaded the gun and given me what he gave Dobleen.

The real killer would have done that too. Unless . . . unless . . . God Almighty, the thing had been staring me in the face for two days, and I'd been too dumb to see it! Sure, Vednick was in on it — without him there'd have been no murder — but he hadn't killed anybody.

I was standing there in the street, fitting the facts together so feverishly that I was only half aware of Vednick's harsh voice: "Do you turn around and stick out those hands, or do I shoot a leg out from under you?"

Almost dazedly I turned and he put the handcuffs on me; then he patted my clothes for weapons. Every single fact fitted. I had the whole works put together without a thing out of place — and no proof for any of it. And no way to get any.

No, there was one way! A longer chance than even the first one had

been. I had no business even thinking of it; but maybe I was too tired of running, of being scared, to realize what I was letting myself in for. All I was thinking was that I knew who the killer was, but if I couldn't find him, I could never prove a thing — and there was only one person who could lead me to him.

I didn't yell. I didn't say a word. I got into the car just as Vednick said to. And he drove out of town, the gun held in his left hand in his lap and pointed at me.

"The jackpot, no less," he grunted. "Brother, are you dumb."

Nobody knew it better than I did. Maybe I was being dumb now, but it was the only chance I had. We'd just have to wait and see.

8.

It was out Purfoy Road again, but not to 6127. This house was a quarter of a mile farther out, but it was much the same kind of a house. And the dunes crowded around in the same way, the same ocean boomed out there to drown any kind of a call for help a man might make.

"Where is the money?" He'd searched the Ford, and now he turned to me.

"I hid it."

"Where?"

"Go to hell."

His fist smashed me in the mouth, and I stumbled and fell, my ears full of a louder roar than the surf.

"Get into the house. We'll see whether you talk or not."

I stumbled into the house. He wouldn't kill me before I told him what he wanted to know. Meanwhile I'd find out what I wanted to know.

Lights were on inside the house, the front door was unlocked, the front room was empty but a door to another room was just closing; and I knew who was behind that door just as surely as I knew the sun would rise tomorrow.

"Come out of there, Dobleen!" My yell sounded crazy even to me. "Come on out and join the party."

And he came out, a slender, frail little man with silver hair and a sharp, half-handsome face that was twisted in tight smile. Vince Dobleen, the cause of everything that had happened to me.

And now was as good a time to make my break as any — Vednick had his back half toward me, closing the door, Dobleen was all the way across the room. I spun and ran for the open hallway, then about ten feet down it to a door — a swinging door, thank God — and I hit it and it slammed back against the wall, and I was in a kitchen. The back door was closed; and, with my hands handcuffed behind my back I just hit it full tilt, my heel slamming in just beside the knob. If it'd been like the door in the other house, my kick would have torn the lock right out of it, but this wood was better stuff.

My foot felt like it was broken, and the door hadn't budged. I was back to it, fumbling for the knob, when Vednick's fist drove my head back against the doorjamb; then he grabbed me and swung me around and back into the stove so hard I hung there, the room spinning around me.

I hadn't had anything planned, except maybe some crazy idea of running around the house, grabbing the keys out of the Ford, and disappearing in the fog among the dunes, and running for a phone at the next house.

And now, sprawled against the stove, what I did next was just as aimless. It was a big, old-fashioned stove, with an open grill top and no pilot lights; my hands were against the handles, and I just turned on as many of them as I could reach, then I lurched back through the swinging door before he'd have time to notice. Maybe later, if one of them went to investigate the smell of gas, I'd get a chance for another break.

9.

After that things were pretty bad for a while. I don't know how long it took; but when Vednick finally stopped to breathe, my left eye was swollen shut and I could barely see through the right. I don't know how many teeth were loose in my mouth, or whether my nose was broken or just too swollen and clogged with blood to breathe

through. "Where," Vednick demanded, "is that money?"

"Go to hell." I'd lost track of how many times I'd said that.

Vednick stared at me sprawled against the sofa, as he peeled off his blood-soaked gloves and lit a cigarette.

I couldn't smell any gas, but it must be getting thick in that small kitchen. When it got thick enough, anything might set it off — the motor in the electric refrigerator starting up, if it was an old enough model; or the doorbell ringing, if the bell was in the kitchen; the spark of the light switch, if one of them went in there to investigate. A lot of things could set it off, but an "if" went with every one of them.

But I couldn't take much more of this beating. If I could talk, maybe I could stall him a while. I opened my one eye, and Dobleen was still showing that tight little smile, like he was enjoying this part of it. Later on, when and if I broke and told where the money was, he'd probably enjoy emptying his gun into my face too. Now talk. Stall . . .

"It was those hands tucked so neatly under the guy's body that cooked you," I told him.

"Smart," Dobleen said in his gentle, acid voice. "So smart I got you two years in prison. And framed you for murder."

"And you're smart — facing a prison term for income tax evasion, and probably a longer term for swindling an old lady out of a hun-

dred thousand dollars. No wonder you figured it was time you died. You and your charities, your work at the Rescue Mission — that's where you picked out the guy who was going to do your dying for you, wasn't it?"

"Get on with it, Vednick," Dobleen said, bored.

"In a minute." Vednick drew on his cigarette.

"And you," I told Vednick. "If I'd known what department you worked in, I'd have tumbled a lot sooner. Fingerprints, isn't it?"

Vednick laughed like that was funny, blowing smoke out.

"The drunk driving thing was faked for the sole purpose of getting Dobleen's prints on record — only it wasn't his prints that went into the record; it was the prints of some poor bum that was unlucky enough to look like Dobleen. After that, it wasn't hard. The house in the name of Rogers was because he wanted to buy a getaway car under a phony name, and there had to be an address to send the registration certificate and pink slip to."

"Smart." Dobleen's eyes were bright with hate. "Now tell us where the money is. You will sooner or later, you know."

I knew. There comes a time when death becomes a release, and that time would come for me, as he said, sooner or later. Unless I could stall.

I could smell the gas now, but that was because I was expecting it. Vednick, smoking, probably

wouldn't smell it for a few minutes yet; and Dobleen was on the other side of the room.

"The fire," I went on in a queer voice that didn't even sound like mine, "was to burn off the hair, char the skin, but it was important to preserve the fingerprints, so the guy's hands were put under his belly where the fire wouldn't destroy them. But what really cooked you, Dobleen, was me grabbing your getaway car with all the dough. Even so, you didn't lose your head. You lit the fire before you set out to follow me in your Cadillac; and you called the fire department a few minutes later from that mobile phone in the Cadillac. But you didn't dare trying to bluff me with an empty gun after I ran you to the curb later."

My laugh sounded crazy. "The bullets were in the Ford. If you tried to reload the gun, I'd jump you. If you'd tried to knock me out to get time to reload, you wouldn't have had a chance — a dried-up runt like you."

The smile had twisted to a snarl. "Get on the job, Vednick."

"Let me finish," I said. "Let me show you how clever I am. After you got away from me, you phoned Vednick and he hustled down to the Rogers' house on the off chance that I might check there after reading the certificate in the Ford — if I'd gone to the cops with it, he'd have slipped out the back door when they showed up."

The smell of gas was bad now. It's a wonder Vednick didn't smell it. And I knew something for sure now — it wasn't going to go off by any accident. Maybe it was thick enough to explode in the kitchen, but Vednick would smell it and put out that cigarette long before the gas would be set off from in here.

"Hey," Dobleen said suddenly, "I smell gas."

"Yeah, me too." Vednick walked over to the hall door, looked down the hall. "Do you suppose —"

I swear, I hadn't planned a thing until that second. I just saw him standing there, the cigarette still in his mouth, and something clicked in my mind and I was already in motion.

My shoulder drove into his back with every ounce of drive I could put into it. His startled yell was a wild sound in the room as he went plunging ahead of me. I hit the floor and tried to press myself flatter against it; and my last glimpse of him before pressing my face to the floor, was him crashing through the swinging door, arms windmilling.

10.

And the cigarette went with him.

It was like the whole universe blew up. There was the blast and the searing lick of flame that seemed to lift me and drive me ahead of it. It seemed a long time later, although it couldn't have been more than a few seconds, that I was push-

ing my head through splintered wood, some of it burning. The shattered plaster was all around me, walls were tilted at a crazy angle; and dimly I realized I had been blown back into the living room.

There was something I had to do.

Something that was more important even than getting myself out of this burning wreckage.

Dobleen!

If he was cremated in this blaze, I could never prove — I stumbled to my feet, unable to use my handcuffed hands. “Dobleen! Where are you! *Dobleen!*”

I heard a feeble moan over the crackle of the flames. A figure so covered with plaster dust that you

had to look twice to see it was a man, rolled a little, moaned again.

Don’t ask me how I did it. I can remember on a little of it, and that only as a dim nightmare. They say I dragged him out of the wreckage and all the way to the ocean, but I don’t remember the last part at all.

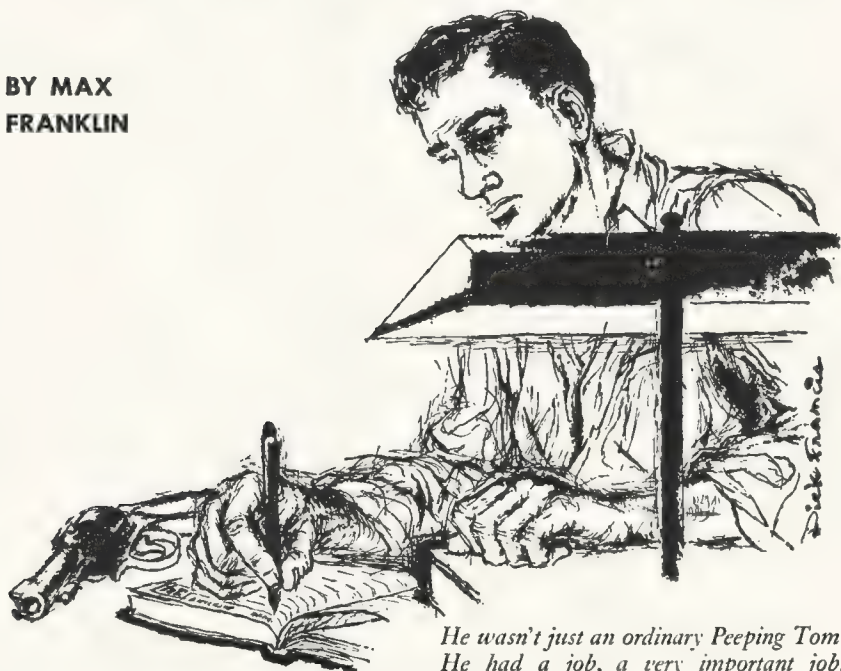
My memory picks up again with the sharp smell of ammonia in my nose, and a voice saying, “He’s coming out of it now.”

Then somebody was kissing my cheek, whispering, “It’s all right now,” and the voice was Julie’s and she was crying. Then I opened my eyes and saw the smile coming through the tears, and I knew she was telling me the truth.



Diary of a Devout Man

BY MAX
FRANKLIN



*He wasn't just an ordinary Peeping Tom.
He had a job, a very important job.*

Monday night:

I HAVE decided to write this diary as though I were talking to you because you are a person who has always interested me, though you will never read these words.

You know me, yet you don't know me. That is, you know my name, what I look like and that I am the son of one of your neighbors. But inside you don't know me at all.

When you see me you probably think what a nice quiet lad I am. Shy and reserved, but always with a pleasant smile and a polite greeting.

Do you know I stood on your front porch for an hour last night watching through a window as you sat in your favorite chair under the lamp, reading?

You sensed it once or twice, I

know, because you stirred and looked around uneasily. But you couldn't see me outside on the dark porch and you couldn't hear me because I have practiced moving without sound and standing perfectly still, hardly even breathing, for long periods of time.

Why did I watch you? Because I watch many people. But I'm not just a Peeping Tom. I'm an observer for God.

The knowledge that I am one of God's personal servants grew in me slowly, for at first the voices didn't make sense to me. They were in some strange language: ancient Hebrew, I now think, because that was the original language of God. When they first spoke to me out of the silence of my room, they were merely jargon, a meaningless discord of many voices. But as they returned on other nights I gradually was able to pick out a word here and a word there, and finally even to make out whole phrases.

It is a tremendous experience when the realization finally hits you that you are one of God's chosen and are listening to the voices of angels.

My mission isn't yet clear to me, but I know this much: I am to watch many people, of which you're but one, and report what I see directly to God.

Tuesday night: The voices spoke to me again last night. I'm still not entirely clear about my mission, but

at least I'm surer about what God wants to know about those I watch. He wants to know which are sinners.

Are you a sinner? You seem an ordinary enough person. I think you love your family and I haven't noticed any signs of discord in your home. But how do I know what goes on in your mind? Maybe in your thoughts you're committing sins of the flesh even while you're talking in apparent innocence with members of your family. According to the Bible mental sin is as evil as the physical act.

I guess I'm going to have to learn to read minds.

Wednesday night: At breakfast this morning Mother fussed over me like a mother hen.

"Do you feel all right, son?" she asked.

"Of course," I said. "Why?"

"You're getting dark circles under your eyes. Sure you aren't studying too hard? Maybe you need glasses."

"I'm quite all right," I told her.

"I'm sure you're studying too hard," she decided, examining my face worriedly. "It's not natural for a twenty-year-old boy to spend so much time alone in his room. You ought to take Mary out some evening."

I didn't tell her I spent much less time alone in my room than she thought. I didn't tell her that almost every night when she thought I was asleep I was prowling the

dark streets, watching those whom God's angels have ordered me to watch. My mother is a religious person, but she hasn't any more imagination than most practical people. She can believe in the saints receiving direct communication from God, but I know she wouldn't be able to believe her own son is an emissary of the Lord. Like too many people, her religious belief stops when miracles strike too close to home. I know if I told her about the voices, she not only wouldn't believe me, she might even do something silly like insisting I go see a psychiatrist.

Suppose Saul's mother had sent him to a psychiatrist?

Instead of attempting to explain, I just said mildly, "Final exams are in two more weeks, Mother. I'll get out more when I've finished cramming."

Mary fussed at me a little too when I picked her up on the way to school. As she slid into the front seat beside me, she studied my face critically before even saying hello.

Then she said, "What's the matter with you lately, hon? You don't look well. And you haven't even so much as called me for over a week."

"Called you?" I said. "I see you every day."

"On the way to school and on the way home," she conceded. "Fine romance. Ever occur to you a girl might like a little night life?"

"Two weeks before finals? Be sensible, Mary."

"I know you're studying hard," she admitted. "So am I for that matter. But it wouldn't kill you to take five minutes off every night to make a phone call."

"I get so involved in law books, I don't think of it," I said. "Maybe I *am* studying too hard. But you can't win a law degree without study. We'll go out on the town the night finals are over."

Then she demanded to know if I had stopped loving her. Of course I said no, but in thinking about it later, I wondered if our plans to marry shouldn't change now that I have a new mission. Is there any room for marriage in a life devoted to service to the Lord? Much as I love Mary, I can't see that there is.

I haven't mentioned the voices to Mary for the same reason I didn't tell Mother. She's a sweet girl, but I know with complete certainty she wouldn't believe any more than Mother would that I've actually been chosen as a servant of God.

Then too I never know exactly how Mary is going to react to things I tell her. Sometimes things that don't strike me as the least funny touch her odd sense of humor. She might even laugh.

Thursday night: I bought a gun today. I'm not exactly sure why. I seemed to be impelled to do it by some force outside of myself.

Perhaps by the power of God's will.

Mary had a chemistry lab, and she thought I was spending the afternoon at the college library, as I usually do on Thursdays until she gets out of lab. I didn't lie to her. When I picked her up to take her home, I simply didn't mention I hadn't gone near the library that afternoon.

I didn't buy the gun locally. I drove thirty miles to another town and got it in a pawn shop. I signed the name Howard Turpin because that's about as unlike mine as I could dream up, and gave the man a fake address. The gun cost me twenty dollars and it's a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver. It's only five-shot instead of six, which struck me as odd. I was under the impression all revolvers were six-shooters.

The gun fascinates me because it's such an ingenious mechanical contrivance. It's what they call a hammerless revolver, and it breaks open by releasing a catch and bending the barrel downward. As the rear of the cylinder comes in view, a small pronged gadget thrusts backward from the center of the cylinder, ejecting all five shells at once. Then, when the gun is fully open, the gadget automatically snaps back into place so the cylinder may be reloaded. I'm not very mechanically inclined and I haven't been able to figure out what makes the gadget work. I'd like to know, but the internal mechanism can't be gotten

at without taking the whole gun apart, and I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to get it back together again properly.

Before I returned to town I bought a box of fifty .32 caliber shells in a hardware store. The clerk didn't even ask my name.

Saturday night: I fired my gun for the first time today. I drove out to the old stone quarry and shot twenty rounds at a tin can. I only hit it once, but I came quite close with all of the last five rounds. I think maybe I should have gotten a gun with a hammer, so I could cock it before firing. This one requires so much trigger pressure, it's hard to hold the gun steady while squeezing.

It has a wonderful kick. Not hard, but definite. A loaded gun in your hand gives you an indefinable sense of power. I felt more exhilarated than I have in months when the stock jolted back against my palm each time I squeezed the trigger.

Mary was a little cross when she learned I'd gone for an afternoon ride without her.

"I thought you were studying," she complained.

"I just felt like a little air," I said.

I didn't tell her I had been target practicing.

Sunday night: In church today, sitting between Mary and Mother, the voices came to me right in the

middle of communion. I pretended to be praying so that Mary and Mother wouldn't realize I was intently listening to something they couldn't hear.

The voices have given me my complete mission finally. I know now what God wants me to do.

I am to kill sinners.

It gave me a warm sense of confidence to sit there in church and feel the pressure of my revolver under my belt and beneath my shirt.

Monday night: I watched you again earlier tonight through your front window while you saw a comedy program on television. Your laughter sounded clean and sinless to me, but I couldn't penetrate your thoughts. I'm not yet sure about you, but I don't think you're a sinner because I can't believe an evil person could laugh like that.

I'm learning to read minds, though, and before long I should be able to read yours.

I find already I can sometimes divine Mary's secret thoughts.

Tuesday night: Tonight I walked the streets for hours, impelled by the same strange force which made me buy a gun. I didn't feel like watching those I've watched in the past, because I'm gradually becoming convinced I won't catch anyone sinning by peering through windows of people's houses. It's away from home that people perform their sins.

So I walked and I tried to penetrate the minds of those I saw on the streets.

At two A.M. I had my first opportunity to serve the Lord, and I failed. But even as I failed I knew I was forgiven, for the voices came to me soothingly rather than in anger. Maybe I was made to fail on purpose, as some kind of test.

I knew the instant I passed the couple in the parked car that I'd found the first sinner I was appointed to kill. He had a girl in his arms and was kissing her in such a sickeningly passionate manner, the sight nearly made me ill.

Sins of the flesh are the vilest of all sins.

Neither paid any attention to me as I walked quietly by, being too preoccupied with each other. A few yards beyond I faded into the deep shadow of a large elm and simply waited.

After a time the couple got out of the car and went up the steps to a porch. It was too dark to see what either looked like, but I got an impression they were both young. Perhaps college students like myself.

Their figures merged on the porch, then separated and I heard a soft goodnight from the girl and a deeper-toned reply from the man. Then her front door opened and closed, and the man came briskly down the steps.

The gun was in my hand, steadied against the bole of the elm, and a great feeling of elation built within

me. As he reached the sidewalk only ten feet from where I stood, I began to squeeze the trigger.

But something happened to distract me. The night was overcast, but just for a moment the clouds shifted enough to let bright moonlight shaft downward. And as the unexpected light struck the face of the man I was on the verge of killing, I recognized him.

He was George Haber, who sits in front of me in my class on criminal jurisprudence.

Of course the mere fact that I knew the man shouldn't have changed my purpose. A sinner's a sinner, regardless of name, and George Haber should have died. But recognizing him startled me enough to make me relax pressure on the trigger, and then it was too late. Haber was in his car, the motor was running and he was pulling away from the curb.

I wasn't confident enough of my marksmanship to risk a shot at such a rapidly moving target.

But the voices assured me there would be future opportunity to kill George Haber.

Wednesday night: I've now managed to develop my mind-reading ability to the point where I know what Mary is thinking about almost constantly. The experience is a revelation.

I've always thought of Mary as a clean, fresh girl incapable of anything evil. But when she talks of

our future marriage and how happy we'll be, I'm shocked to discover part of her thoughts are on the wedding night. She actually looks forward with a kind of frightened but pleasurable anticipation to being in bed with me.

Thoughts of sex have never occupied my mind. I suppose subconsciously I knew men and women engaged in carnal acts after marriage, but it never actually occurred to me Mary and I would do such things after marriage. Not that I don't know the facts of life. I simply hadn't ever thought beyond the marriage ceremony.

I know it sounds ridiculous for a grown man to say such a thing, I now realize when I try to analyze my relationship with Mary, but I literally haven't ever had a single sexual thought about her. I think my picture of married life must have been a vague notion that things would go on much as they had, with me taking Mary for rides, going to an occasional movie or dance, and occasionally indulging in a chaste kiss which was no more than a brief pressure of lips against lips.

I know now I can never marry her. The thought of actually sleeping in the same bed with a woman is revolting to me.

In the eyes of God sinning in your mind is as evil as actual sin.

Thursday night: It is part of my duty to God to remain free to

perform His service. The history of Christianity is bloody with martyrs who have died because of bigotry and misunderstanding. I know Society wouldn't understand or believe I'm a real emissary of God, and therefore it's part of my duty to prevent Society from finding out my function.

I planned Mary's execution for her sins accordingly.

After lunch today I told Mary my mother wanted me home to run some errands, so I wouldn't be able to wait for her to get out of her chem lab as I usually do on Thursdays. Then I drove home, put the car in the garage and entered the house by the back door.

Mother was surprised to see me so early.

"I've got to study this afternoon," I explained. "I'll be in my room till supper, and I'd rather not be disturbed."

"Of course, dear," she said. "I won't call you until supper's on the table."

Mary's lab lasted two hours, from one until three. I waited one hour, then quietly left my room by the window. There is a tall hedge between our house and the one next door, so I was able to make the garage without being seen.

Fortunately the alley slants a little toward the street. Releasing the emergency brake, I pushed the car out into the alley, quietly closed the garage doors and then let the car roll to the street a

quarter block away before starting the motor.

I timed my arrival at school for five after three. As I expected, I caught Mary walking alone on the street running alongside the campus when she was about halfway between the Science Building and the bus stop. Only one or two other students were in sight, for there are no lectures on the campus in the afternoon, only lab sessions, and not very many students take laboratory courses. I saw no one I knew, and no one paid any attention to the attractive coed getting into the car which pulled up alongside of her.

"This is a happy surprise," Mary said.

"I finished my chores early," I explained easily.

I swung through the park as usual, but then instead of turning left toward our homes, I turned right.

"Where we going?" Mary asked.

"I feel like a ride," I said. "It's only a little after three."

"All right," she said agreeably.

When we reached the ancient and rutted road leading to the stone quarry, Mary seemed surprised that I turned down it.

"The Old Ox Road," she said. "I haven't been here since high school. Don't tell me my sedate lover wants to park and neck."

If I had been tempted not to carry out my purpose, her remark would have steadied me. More and

more recently Mary's thoughts and conversation have hinged around disgusting physical relations between us.

I said noncommittally, "I just want to show you something."

I parked right at the entrance to the quarry. Mary seemed puzzled when I got out, but she got out too and we walked hand-in-hand over to the deep pool in the quarry's center.

"I've heard this is over a hundred feet deep," she said, peering down into the clear but seemingly bottomless depth.

I took out my gun.

"Where'd you get that?" Mary asked, her eyes widening.

"Bought it," I said. "Do you believe in God, Mary?"

"Of course," she said. She was looking at me curiously, not afraid, or even uneasy, but thoroughly puzzled.

"Then I want you to pray," I said.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded.

"I want you to pray God forgiveness for your sins. Now. You have about three seconds."

Her eyes grew as big as saucers, but she still seemed to think it was some kind of joke. With her mouth shaped into a small O, she simply stared at me in astonishment. Even what she must have seen in my eyes failed to make her believe I was going to kill her.

She was still looking astonished

but unafraid when I fired five shots into her chest at a distance of two feet.

It may be years before they find her weighted body on the bottom of that pool. If they ever find it.

And even if they find it at once, nothing points to me. I got the car back in the garage and myself back in my room without incident. When Mother rapped on the door at six, I was deeply engrossed in my law books.

Friday night: I was up nearly all last night with both Mary's folks and my own, waiting for some word from the police. Of course no word came.

I believe I act as convincingly worried as the others.

Saturday night: The police questioned me for a long time today, but seemed entirely unsuspicious. Since I have a perfect alibi and both Mary's folks and mine told them Mary and I got along wonderfully, they haven't any reason to be suspicious. Most of their questions were about whether anything had been on Mary's mind recently, and particularly whether there was any possibility of her having eloped with some other man.

I told them the suggestion was preposterous, that we were engaged to be married and she never went with other men.

Monday night: Mary's mother is confined to bed. Emotional upset,

the doctor says. Last night, as we all sat around at Mary's house waiting for the phone to ring, she suddenly screamed, "It would even be a relief to learn she's dead! I can't stand this *not knowing* another minute!"

Then she started to sob and was still sobbing when the doctor came.

I suppose it will be some time before Mary's folks and mine stop talking about the mysterious disappearance. But eventually they'll have to. You can't sit up night after night forever waiting for news which is never going to arrive.

And I must be on with the Lord's work.

Tonight: This is the first time I have watched you since Mary's

death. What would you think if you knew an agent of God was staring at you this very moment? Would you be frightened?

You should be, for at last I am able to penetrate that pleasant outer manner of yours and see the real person inside. I'm sickened that you can sit there, reading your magazine with such a serene expression on your face, when your mind is a sewer of carnal thoughts.

You look very comfortable sprawled in that chair. Do you know how I am watching you? Over the sights of my gun, which is centered on your neck just below the ear.

It's time for you to start praying now, because my finger is whitening on the trigger . . .



I WAS working the late rewrite trick when the call came in. The night city editor took it, then cupped his hand over the mouthpiece and yelled at me.

"This girl says she's going to pull the dutch act. Talk to her while I try to trace it."

I cursed silently as I cut in on the extension. God damn women; there's always one phoning the City Room and saying she's going to kill herself. Either they're drunk or want assurance that their homemade sendoff will make page one.

I asked the girl her means of exit. A gun, she said. A gun, I told her, leaves a mess. So why didn't she hike down to the corner drugstore for some sleeping pills? She started whimpering.

That did it. I said this was a damn busy newspaper and suggested she hang up like a nice girl and hit the sack.



The girl called up and said she was going to kill herself. That's what gave the reporter his very special

Opportunity

BY RUSSELL E. BRUCE

Her voice became apologetic. She had mailed the newspaper a letter. Would I personally watch for it? She described the stationery and I said I would. She thanked me and blew her brains out.

Later I went back to Morgue for a routine background check before I wrote her obit. I didn't expect to find anything; her name meant nothing to me. But there was a skinny folder with *Ann Hastings* typed neatly in the corner. Inside were two clips — a brief story and a picture.

The story told of her graduation from college with highest honors three years ago. The picture showed an attractive Brunette accepting congratulations from her parents. But it was a dark little man standing slightly to the side that caught my attention. I put an eye glass on him to make sure. It was Louis J. Oriole.

Louie was top bully for the local political machine. A real nice fellow who got his kicks clobbering old women and children.

What the hell was a guy like Louie doing at the college graduation of a girl like Ann?

I went off duty at five in the morning and spent three hours in a bar trying for the answer. It wouldn't come. I told no one about the picture or the letter. If there was a story, I wanted it for myself.

I returned to the office just in time to catch a copy boy coming in off the early morning mail run. He tossed the first class mail on a desk

and I picked out the letter in a couple of seconds — a blue envelope with red lettering.

Inside was a key to a locker at the Central Bus Terminal.

The brief case wasn't locked. I pulled out a batch of papers. On top was a short letter signed by Ann Hastings.

It said her father was a ward leader who had borrowed money from Louie to put her through college. Louie, quite by accident, met her and his interest became more than academic. He offered her a job when she finished college. She accepted and inside a year was visiting him at home, on demand.

Three weeks ago she had learned she was pregnant. She went to Louie. He gave her a thousand bucks and told her to make tracks — for keeps.

She decided to solo into eternity. But as a lasting memento to Louie, here were a few items the newspapers might be interested in.

Sweat erupted on the back of my neck. The story was mine, exclusive. It would be spread all over page one, under my by-line. There would be a bonus, journalism awards. I would be famous.

I dashed to the street, looking for a car . . .

I was smiling as I slowly returned to the bus station, put the brief case back in a locker, dropped the key in an envelope, addressed it to myself and mailed it.

Then I headed for Louie's office.

They had to sneak the blonde in quietly. If Mrs. Danielson caught on, nobody knew what might happen...



BY
HAYDEN
HOWARD

The Housemother Cometh

THE bottle-blond's elegant and unsteady shape was plastered between the two sophomores. They precariously buoyed her against gravity. But her terrifyingly loud

giggles they could no more suppress than bubbles rising in uncapped beer.

To their frantic whispers she giggled happy responses while they

maneuvered her under their house-mother's window and up the backstairs to the dorm rooms.

Fred peered down the empty hall. As he listened to Mrs. Danielson's footsteps rapping back and forth on the floor below, he discovered he was not so heroically inebriated as he had imagined.

The mating of key with lock seemed endless in Beau's trembling hands. Whispering angrily, the two sophomores wrestled with the key and knob. The door sprang inward with a bang.

"Oh gawd, she'll hear," Beau moaned.

The woman whinnied as Fred snatched her into their room. He could hear doors opening curiously up and down the hall as Beau closed theirs and clicked the light switch.

"Turn it off, you fool," he gasped.

Stumbling in the redoubled darkness, they pulled down the shades while Fred's bed creaked beneath the settling weight of the woman.

Under the harsh electric light, he saw her neck was laced with pink, powdered creases he had not noticed in the blue glow of the bar. She was smiling juicily at Beau; his room-mate's baby face glistened with tiny jewels of perspiration.

"Who has a drinkee?" Her curly-lashed, mahogany and slightly pied eyes wrinkled at their corners in twin smiles as she struggled her white shoulder out of her coat.

Beau gawked as though he was

watching the opening of his induction notice. Fred twisted the pint from his coat pocket, filled his tooth-brush glass and handed it to her. She barely acknowledged it.

Smiling helpfully at Beau, who sat down weakly on his own bed, she burred: "Beau, honey? That short for Beaumont? You talk like a Texas boy."

"Yes, ma'am. Gawd, Fred, pour me more than that."

"He's from Fort Worth though," Fred croaked, clutching the bottle against his blue shirt with one pale, hairy-backed hand. "He's majoring in Econ." His voice died uncertainly as, dimpling, she fluttered her eyelids at Beau.

"You come sit by me, honey. You're the cutest thing I've seen from Texas."

His hand left his glass standing precariously on the bed as tentatively he began to rise. But his wide blue eyes deserted her for Fred.

"We were going to flip a coin," Fred's voice bullfrogged, then leapt shrill as Beau fumbled a hand into his pocket. "No, you go right ahead, Beau. I'll step out. I can be studying for my —"

But Beau reversed his rising, upsetting the glass. Jaw agape as its dampness reached his skin he rose again as her whinnying giggle brought a warning hiss from Fred.

"Keep it down. Mrs. Danielson hears every little sound."

She giggled more gently, recross-

ing her knees, bemusedly watching Beau's scrubbing motions with his handkerchief until he raised his face, red-eared.

Fred's lips winced. Red ears fading, Beau stared at the closed door. They listened with their mouths open.

"Beau dear," she giggled unabashed. "You and your roommate better give me the thirty little green men for my purse."

"Thirty?" Fred squawked. "You said twenty-five for the two of us."

"Did I now?" Her blonde head wagged on its rubber stem. Crossing her plump arms, she hitched herself inward and upward. "That was when I thought you boys had an apartment or a car. Let's have it boys, or mama starts screaming."

Fred glared at her face while he fingered backward for his wallet. His hand hesitated between two powerful emotions.

"You said twenty-five. Didn't she, Beau?" But he counted fifteen one dollar bills onto the patched coverlid.

"And we thank you." Turning her body inside her dress, she raised her eyebrows at Beau and he edged over and handed her a twenty dollar bill.

"I bet your Daddy owns an oil well, Beau," she giggled, as she pushed the thirty-five dollars into her imitation alligator handbag. "If you say he does —." Her eyelashes fluttered in genuine welcome, even without oil wells, welcome.

Beau giggled, retreated toward his own bed, sneezed and clawed embarrassedly for his handkerchief while her voice caressed him: "You're not catching cold are you honey?"

"If you think I might give you a cold, I —" Beau's glance drifted uneasily toward the door.

She winked at Fred, who chuckled half-heartedly.

Her delighted shriek rang like glass against the walls.

"Quiet," Fred gasped in agony. "Her room's practically underneath us."

Stretching luxuriously with a sleepy hiccup, she gurgled: "Texas, stop scratching yourself and come to mama."

"Gawd, Fred, pour me another." He edged around her extended nylons and sat down close to Fred. But his rosy face was beaming at her, and he wiggled away from Fred.

Fred stood up haughtily.

At that pregnant moment, the arthritic footsteps of Mrs. Danielson started clumping up the inner stairway. Fred's glass and bottle clashed as Beau jumped up. The woman whinnied in sudden decrease of humor, and her eyes tried to focus together on the door.

The hard-heeled steps measured three doorways to theirs and stopped — audible breathing through the door.

"Who's in there, Fred?" Mrs. Danielson's keys jingled.

The lock clicked. Beau and Fred

stared at each other in horror. Fred made a pushing motion with his hand and Beau, who was closer, caught the door with his foot and shoulder, but Mrs. Danielson was heavier than he and wheezingly determined. Through the widening door space his head disappeared and his voice mumbled something unintelligible.

Mrs. Danielson's voice exploded like a string of firecrackers. "Beaumont Compton, you've been drinking!"

Inside, the blonde woman stood up, shook out her dress and in one fluid motion engulfed the square bottle within her cavernous purse.

Her voice flowed smoothly over Beau's stammer. "Open the door, Beau dear. I don't know where your manners have gone. I do so want to meet your housemother."

With a moan, Beau stepped back and the door bumped after him.

Iron-grey hair strangling across her forehead, arms akimbo, the elderly woman stared. Her expression of tight-lipped distrust loosened uncertainly as the blonde woman crunched brightly on a peppermint from her purse, then stepped forward with her arms extended in feminine greeting.

"Oh, Mrs. Danielson, I'll have to apologize for Beau and introduce myself. I'm Mrs. Compton, Beau's mother. Beau has written me such nice things about you. I know you have made this a regular home away from home for him."

Mrs. Danielson stroked self-consciously at her house-dress. "Yes, I do the best I can." She smiled unevenly. "We have a nice group this semester. I wouldn't have come up, but the boys are studying for finals and we have absolute quiet after supper so that we can all study." Her hand made an involuntary lunge as though she had fumbled the ball, and she added glibly: "Of course I didn't hear you, you weren't making any noise, I just came up to see if the boys needed fresh towels. I'm so pleased to meet you, Mrs. Compton."

The blonde woman dimpled. "Yes, and I'm so pleased to meet you. I worry about Beau. In high school he didn't always turn in his homework on time." She stroked at Beau's head, but he shied away as she gushed: "I had an airline change here on my way to Banff for the national convention of my sorority, and I knew the boys would be studying hard for finals, but I was just dying for them to show me around the campus and that divine little village."

"Yes, it is quaint." The housemother tittered politely.

"I wonder if I could telephone a cab from here. My plane leaves at eleven o'clock. My, that's only twenty minutes."

"Oh yes, we have a pay phone downstairs. Could I make you a cup of tea? Those airline trips are so tiring."

"That would be awfully nice of

you, if it wouldn't be too much trouble?"

"Oh no, no, dear, my teakettle is already on the stove."

Past the row of unshaven undergraduate faces that protruded and retracted from doorways, the four of them trailed uncomfortably downstairs. Fred and Beau stood open-mouthed in the lower hall while the woman telephoned for a cab. Before Fred could find words, she retreated from the telephone to the kitchen.

They could hear the two women laughing politely inside.

The cabby's knock cut short the sophomores' frantic angry whispers. The blonde woman bustled magically down the hall, politely pursued by Mrs. Danielson.

"Goodbye dear, study hard now." She kissed Beau deftly and patted Fred's half-raised hand.

Stepping quickly, she cut them off from the door. "Goodbye Mrs.

Danielson, I wouldn't have missed our little chat for the world. I'm so relieved about Beau."

The taxi door slammed before they were halfway down the steps. They could not shout or curse because Mrs. Danielson was sighing pleasantly behind them.

"Beau, I love the way your mother does her hair."

Beau and Fred glared unreasonably at each other.

After she had clumped back to her own room, Mrs. Danielson clicked on the light above her mirror. She pushed her own grey straggle atop her head; her eyes flitted to the army of bottles and other feminine equipment on her dresser, but the sound of a yelling, thumping fight upstairs brought her charging out and up the stairs with a bobby pin bristling between her teeth.

Beau's mother hardly gone and Fred and he were fighting!



Manslaughter



Madden hit the guy and Madden fractured the guy's skull. But it really wasn't Madden who killed him . . .

BY HENRY EWALD

THE GUY they're holding for manslaughter is named John Madden.

They've got five witnesses who saw him start a barroom brawl, slug

a guy and knock him down. The guy hit his head on the corner of the bar rail when he fell and he died later of a fractured skull.

Madden's going to be sent up.

He hasn't got any defense. He was drinking and he started the brawl, but they know he isn't the real killer. The real killer is a girl who never saw the dead man in her life and who was ten miles away from the fight when it started.

She's a little brunette named Mary Brown, and she forgot to make a telephone call.

Madden — the guy they're holding — was a salesman, but he's been out of work for six months and now his wife is going to have a kid. The Maddens have been living on money borrowed from Madden's life insurance.

When he worked, he had the same boss as Mary Brown had, but he got to drinking too much on the job and he was fired. Since then, he'd been trying to get into something steady, without much luck.

Yesterday he went back to see his ex-boss. He told him about the kid on the way and he begged for another chance.

The boss knows that Madden is a good worker when he's sober, and good salesmen don't come a dime a dozen. So he told Madden he'd think it over, and he said he'd call Madden if he decided to put him back on the job.

Madden went home hopeful last night. He was sure he'd get another chance, and he was pretty happy about it. He and his wife were excited, talking about how they'd get things going right again, and

how they'd manage better this time on the money he'd be earning. They were both real happy.

This morning, Madden's old boss remembered his promise, and he told Mary Brown to call Madden's home and tell him to report for work.

Mary Brown made a note of the phone number on the cover of her notebook. She intended making the call before she started to transcribe her dictation. Before that, though, her boy friend called her. After she had made a date with him she started right in typing letters, without ever thinking of Madden again.

All this time, remember, Madden was sitting at home. He and his wife were waiting for the phone to ring with the message that would mean a fresh start for both of them.

At first they were talking and joking a lot, but as the morning wore along without a phone call, the talk died down.

They ate some lunch and Madden said he wouldn't leave the house because if he did he might miss the phone call. Mrs. Madden said she hoped it would come soon. It was terrible, she said, to live the way they were living.

Madden blew his top then. He said he was trying every way he knew how to find work, and even if it was all his fault, for God's sake, he wasn't the first guy in the world to make a mistake. He wanted to know if she was ever going to quit nagging him about it, and he

said he didn't enjoy the way they were living any more than she did but he wasn't going to cry about it for the rest of his life. There were some things about his wife, he said, that didn't suit him too well, but he wasn't going to cry about them, either.

One word led to another and they ended up by shouting at each other.

Then Mrs. Madden went into the bathroom to cry and Madden put on his hat. He said to hell with waiting for the phone to ring, and he left the apartment.

He hadn't had a drink for about three months, but he got to thinking that neither his wife nor his boss believed in him, and so what good was it to try and make a comeback? He stopped at a bar and got a double whisky. After he had sat around for a while he had another. That made him feel better, and he told himself he didn't give a damn what his wife or his boss thought about him.

He didn't go home for dinner. Mrs. Madden waited for him and when he didn't show up she began to worry about him, fearing that he had started — as he had — to drink again.

About eight o'clock that evening, Madden was pretty drunk, and he had no money left to spend. He hated to go home and face his wife, though, because he was beginning to realize what a fool he had made of himself. That started to work on him and make him irritable, looking

for a fight — not at all like his usual self.

Somebody at the bar was talking about Senator McCarthy and what a good job he was doing on the Reds. Madden, still sore at the world, said to hell with that stuff, and that started the argument. The guy who liked McCarthy called Madden a dirty subversive and a Commie, and said he ought to be run out of the country.

Madden said: "Well, you might try to make McCarthy run me out of the country, but first I'm going to run you out of this ginmill."

Then he slugged the guy.

But Madden didn't really kill the guy. Mary Brown killed him.

If Madden had gotten that call, the guy he slugged could have gone on talking about McCarthy all night and neither Madden nor anybody else would have cared. There wouldn't have been any cops in the barroom to grab Madden for manslaughter if he'd gotten his call.

But there's a guy dead and somebody has to be charged. There's got to be a patsy and that patsy is John Madden.

It's a rotten jam and it's going to wreck three lives.

But there's a lawyer arranging bail now. Once you're out on bail you're free, until the case comes up. And you might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

So when I get out on bail I'm going to find Mary Brown and I'm going to kill her. Me. John Madden.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 16 — Vernon Oldaker

BY DAN SONTUP

THERE'S no law against being fond of playing the horses; and even if a man is unemployed and on relief and has a wife and four kids to support, there's not too much you can do to him if he still retains his fondness for betting a few bucks on the ponies. But Vernon Oldaker's list of "credits" went far beyond this. He was a former bookie, a bigamist, a man who had deserted two wives, a convicted thief — and, finally, a murderer.

The ironic part of it all is that he not only killed the one woman who had gotten him on relief and who had added to this by continually giving him money out of her own pocket, but he also left enough obvious clues to point to himself as the killer and ended up by virtually inviting the police to come and get him.

Vernon, his wife, and his four children all lived in what was little better than a shack on the outskirts of town, and it was only through the kindness of Anne McKee, an elderly and very wealthy philanthropist, that none of the Oldaker family starved. Miss McKee saw to it that Vernon was placed on relief, that he got his check regu-

larly, and that he didn't lack for a few extra dollars, which she gave to him herself. But, even so, the family came close to starvation many times because Vernon liked to play the horses.

It was an old story — he'd bet and lose and then bet some more trying to make back his losses. The only result was that the relief money seldom went for feeding and clothing his family. Instead, it was spent on Vernon's efforts to prove that he was a first-class handicapper — which he certainly wasn't.

One March morning, Vernon woke up to the fact that all his relief check had been spent. He was broke, but he was sure that this was only temporary. Miss McKee would take care of him again, and Vernon was positive he could pick a real winner this time.

He wasted no time in going to her house, and he found the old woman alone in the big house — alone and not exactly anxious to give him any money this time.

She refused flatly, even though Vernon tried to play on her sympathy by pointing out that his family would starve unless he got some money to feed them. It didn't

work. Miss McKee knew from bitter experience in the past with Vernon that any money she'd give him would go to the nearest bookie and not to the neighborhood grocer.

Vernon kept on begging, then he started to argue, but Miss McKee was adamant — she wouldn't give him a cent. Finally, when Vernon became even more persistent, Miss McKee told him to follow her and she'd show him that, even if she wanted to help him, she didn't have any money in the house that day.

She led him out into the hallway to where her purse was lying on the table. Vernon noticed a hammer there also, but didn't bother to think about who had been using it or how it had gotten on the table.

Miss McKee picked up her purse, her back to Vernon — and that's when Vernon lost control of himself.

He grabbed the hammer and swung it at Miss McKee's head. He missed, and the hammer went over her head and thudded into the wall. Vernon drew back his arm and swung again before Miss McKee could get away from him. He hit her this time, and then he kept on swinging, the hammer missing and striking the wall almost as many times as it hit the woman.

When it was all over, and Miss McKee had fallen to the floor, Vernon had hit her four times in the head.

She looked dead. There was

enough blood all over her head, but Vernon had to make sure. He went out to the kitchen, picked up the sharpest knife he could find, and came back to the hallway. He made certain by using the knife.

He was sure she was dead now. He dropped the knife and dragged the body back into the living room. Then, remembering that he had come there for money, he searched her desk, found a checkbook, and tore out a handful of blank checks. He went back to the hallway, got her purse and the hammer, and left the house.

There was only nine dollars in cash in the purse, and Vernon tossed it and the hammer into the river before clearing out of town. He had left the knife behind, and while this might not have been an important clue, it didn't really matter because Vernon proceeded to put the finger on himself as the killer.

He forged Miss McKee's signature to five of the blank checks during his travels — and he was foolish enough to make out three of the checks to himself.

Naturally, the bank reported the matter to the police when the checks came through, and the police now knew for certain who the killer was. The usual bulletins went out, and the usual routine search was started for a wanted man.

Vernon eluded the police for a while, but then he apparently decided that it was time he wrote

home to find out how his wife and family were making out — since he had left town without even letting them know about it. He wrote to his wife from another city, being careful not to include a return address. It was never made clear just what he hoped to accomplish by writing to his wife and not giving a return address, but the police now had a definite lead as to his whereabouts.

They checked the postmark, informed the local authorities in that city, sent along a description of Vernon, and the rest was just a matter of time. Vernon was picked

up on the street just a few days after he had mailed the letter.

He broke down easily under police questioning, and confessed to the crime. At his trial, he tried to plead insanity. Even though he certainly had behaved in a peculiar manner — not trying to cover his trail after the killing — the plea wasn't allowed. It may have helped, though, because Vernon did manage to cheat the chair.

He was found guilty of murder in the second degree and sentenced to life in prison — where going on relief and playing the ponies are not a part of everyday life.



AT ONE O'CLOCK in the morning the taverns along Sixth Street are usually full. But there aren't many people on the street. With only a half hour left until curfew, most people don't want to waste drinking time walking from one bar to another.

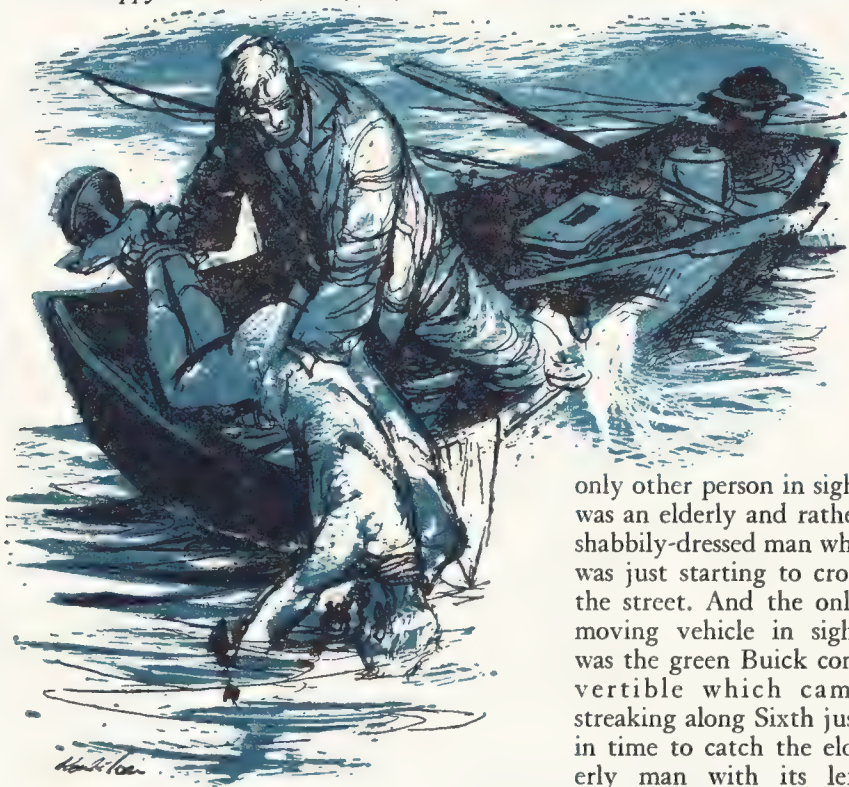
When I stepped out of the *Happy Hollow*, the..

Hit and Run

Barney had seen the old man get hit, but he didn't feel sorry for him. The old man might provide him with some cash.

A Complete Novel

BY RICHARD DEMING



only other person in sight was an elderly and rather shabbily-dressed man who was just starting to cross the street. And the only moving vehicle in sight was the green Buick convertible which came streaking along Sixth just in time to catch the elderly man with its left front fender as he stepped

from between two parked cars. The car was driving on the left side of the street because Sixth is one-way at that point and either lane is legal.

The old man flew back between the cars he had just walked between to land in a heap on the sidewalk. With a screech of brakes the green convertible swerved right clear across the street and sideswiped two parked cars.

The crash was more terrific than the damage. Metal screamed in agony as a front fender was torn from the first parked car and a rear fender half ripped from the body of the second. The convertible caromed to the center of the street, hesitated for a moment, then gunned off like a scared rabbit.

But not before I had seen all I needed to see. That section of Sixth is a solid bank of taverns and clubs, and neon signs make it as bright as day. With the convertible's top down, I could see the occupants clearly.

The driver was a woman, hatless and with raven black hair to her shoulders. I could see her only in profile, but I got an impression of evenly molded features and sun-tanned complexion. The man next to her I saw full face, for as the car shot away he stared back over his shoulder at the motionless figure on the sidewalk. He too was hatless, a blond, handsome man with a hairline mustache. I recognized him instantly.

He was Harry Cushman, twice-married and twice-divorced café society playboy whose romantic entanglements regularly got him in the local gossip columns.

Automatically I noted the license number of the Buick convertible was X-42-209-30.

The crash brought people pouring from doorways all along the block. A yell of rage from across the street, followed by a steady stream of swearing, told me at least one of the damaged cars' owners had arrived on the scene.

"Anybody see it?" I heard someone near me ask.

Then somebody discovered the man lying on the sidewalk. As a crowd began to gather around him, I crossed the street to look at the two damaged cars. Beyond a ruined fender on each, neither seemed particularly harmed. One was a Dodge and one a Ford, and I tried to file the license number of each in my mind along with the Buick's.

Apparently someone in the crowd had thought to call an ambulance and the police, for a few moments later they arrived simultaneously. I stood at the edge of the crowd as the police cleared a path for the City Hospital intern who had come with the ambulance and the intern bent over the injured man.

The man wasn't dead, for I could hear the intern asking him questions and the old man answering in a weak voice. I couldn't hear what they said, but after a few moments

the intern rose and spoke in a louder voice to one of the cops.

"He may have a fractured hip. Can't tell for sure without X-rays. I don't think anything else is broken."

Then, under the intern's instructions, two attendants got the old man on a stretcher and put him in the ambulance.

"I didn't get the guy's name," the cop complained.

"John Lischer," the intern said. "You can get his address later. His temporary address for a while will be City Hospital."

By now it was twenty after one. I re-entered the *Happy Hollow* for a nightcap, and while I was sipping it I wrote down on an envelope I found in my pocket the three license numbers and the name John Lischer.

2.

The private detective business isn't particularly good in St. Louis. In New York State a private cop can pick up a lot of business gathering divorce evidence, because up there the only ground for divorce is adultery. But in Missouri you can get a divorce for cruelty, desertion, non-support, alcoholism, if your spouse commits a felony, impotency, if your wife is pregnant at marriage, indignities, or if the husband is a vagrant. So why hire a private cop to prove adultery?

I have to pick up nickels wherever I can find them.

By noon the next day I'd learned

from the Bureau of Motor Vehicle records that license X-42-209-30 was registered to Mrs. Lawrence Powers at a Lindell address across the street from Forest Park. The address gave me a lift, because there aren't any merely well-off people in that section. Most of them are millionaires.

I also checked the licenses of the Dodge and the Ford, learning their owners were respectively a James Talmadge on South Jefferson and a Henry Taft on Skinker Boulevard. Then I called City Hospital and asked about the condition of John Lischer.

The switchboard operator informed me it was listed as fair.

I waited another twenty-four hours before calling on Mrs. Lawrence Powers. I picked two P.M. as the best time to arrive.

The Powers's home was a huge rose granite affair of at least fourteen rooms, surrounded by fifty feet of perfect lawn in all four directions. A colored maid came to the door.

"Mrs. Powers, please," I said, handing the maid one of my cards reading: *Bernard Calhoun, Confidential Investigations.*

She let me into a small foyer, left me standing there while she went off with the card. In a few minutes she came back with a dubious expression on her face.

"Mrs. Powers is right filled up with appointments this afternoon, Mr. Calhoun. She wants to know

have you got some particular business?"

I said, "Tell her it's about an auto accident."

The colored girl disappeared again, but returned almost immediately.

"Just follow me please, sir," she said.

She led me through a living room about thirty feet long whose furnishings alone probably cost a year of my income, through an equally expensive dining room and onto a large sun-flooded sun porch at the side of the house. Mrs. Lawrence Powers reclined at full length in a canvas deck chair, wearing brief red shorts and a similarly-colored scarf. She wore nothing else, not even shoes, and obviously had been sun bathing when I interrupted her.

The maid left us alone and I examined Mrs. Powers at the same time she was studying me. She was the same woman I had seen at the wheel of the Buick convertible. She was about thirty, I judged, a couple of years younger than me, and she had a body which started my heart hammering the moment I saw her. Not only was it perfectly contoured, her flesh was a creamy tan so satiny in texture, I had to control an impulse to reach out and test if it were real. She was beautiful clear from the tip of her delicately-shaped little nose to the tips of her small toes. Even her feet were lovely.

But her face didn't have any more expression than a billiard ball.

After a moment she calmly rose from her deck chair, turned her back to me and said, "Tie me up, please." Her voice was pleasantly husky, but there was a curious flatness to it.

She had folded the scarf into a triangle and now held the two ends behind her for me to tie together. Taking them, I crossed them in the middle of her back. The touch of my knuckles against her bare flesh sent a tremor up my arms and I had an idiotic impulse to lean down and press my mouth against the smooth shoulder immediately in front of me.

Killing the impulse, I asked, "Tight enough?"

"It'll do."

I tied a square knot.

She turned around right where she was, which put her face an inch in front of mine and about six inches below. She was a tall woman, about five feet eight, because I stand six feet two.

Looking up at me without expression, she said in a toneless voice, "You're a big man, Mr. Calhoun."

For several moments I stood staring down at her, not even thinking. I'm not used to having scantily-clad women push themselves so close to me on first meeting, and I wasn't sure how to take her. Then I got my brain functioning again and decided she probably wasn't used

to having strange men walk into her house, take one look at her and then grab her and kiss her. Probably, despite her seeming provocation, she'd scream for her maid.

I said, "Two-ten in my bare skin," backed away and took a deck chair similar to hers. Gracefully Mrs. Powers sank back into her own.

"You're a private detective, Mr. Calhoun?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And you wanted to see me about some accident?"

"The one night before last. Involving a green Buick convertible with license X-42-209-30, a parked Dodge belonging to a man named James Talmadge, a parked Ford belonging to a man named Henry Taft, and a pedestrian named John Lischer who's currently at City Hospital in fair condition. A hit-and-run accident."

She was silent for a moment. Then she merely said, "I see."

"I happened to be coming out of *Happy Hollow* just as it took place," I said. "I was the only person on the street aside from John Lischer, and I'm sure I was the only witness. I got a good look at both the driver of the Buick and the passenger. Good enough to recognize both. You were the driver and Harry Cushman was the passenger."

Again she said, "I see." Then, after studying me without expression, she asked, "What do you want?"

"Have you reported the accident?"

When she looked thoughtful, I said, "I can easily check at headquarters. I haven't yet because I didn't want to be questioned."

"I see. No, I haven't reported it."

"What does your husband do, Mrs. Powers?"

A fleeting frown marred the smoothness of her brow, but it was gone almost instantly.

"He's president of Haver National Bank."

"Then you haven't told your husband about the accident either." I made it a statement instead of a question.

She regarded me thoughtfully. "Why do you assume that?"

"Because I don't think the president of Haver National Bank would let an accident his wife was involved in go unreported for thirty-seven hours. Particularly where no one was seriously hurt, you undoubtedly have liability insurance, and the worst you could expect if you turned yourself in voluntarily would be a fine and temporary suspension of your driver's license. He'd know the charge against you would be much more serious if the police have to track you down than if you turned yourself in on your own, even at this late date."

Her face remained deadpan. "So?"

"So I think the reason you didn't stop, and the reason you don't intend to report the accident, isn't

because you lost your head. You don't impress me as the panicky type. I think the reason you didn't stop was because you couldn't afford to let your husband find out you were out with Harry Cushman at one in the morning."

When she said nothing at all, I asked, "Have you tried to have your car fixed yet?"

She shook her head.

"Where is it?"

"In the garage out back."

"How come your husband hasn't noticed the damage?"

"It's all on the right side," she said tonelessly. "A smashed front fender, bent bumper and dented door. Nothing was knocked loose. We have a three-car garage and my stall is the far right one. I parked it close to the wall so no one could walk around on that side. The station wagon's between my car and my husband's Packard, so there isn't much likelihood of him noticing the damage."

"You say nothing was knocked loose? Was your headlight broken?"

"No. I don't believe I left any clues at the scene of the crime."

I leaned back and put the tips of my fingers together. In a conversational tone I said, "You must have left some green paint on the two cars you hit. By now the police have alerted every repair garage within a fifty-mile radius to watch for a green car. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes."

"How you plan to get around it?"

"I haven't yet solved the problem."

"Would you be interested in some advice?"

"What advice?" she asked.

"Hire a private detective to get you out of your jam," I said.

3.

For a long time she looked at me, her expression completely blank. When she spoke there was the slightest touch of mockery in her voice.

"I was frightened when Alice said you wanted to see me about an auto accident, Mr. Calhoun. But almost from the moment you walked through the door I knew you hadn't come to investigate me on behalf of that old man or either of the two car owners. I'm a pretty good judge of character. Out of the four people involved, how did you happen to pick me as your potential client?"

"I doubt that any of the others could stand my fee."

Her face grew thoughtful again. "I see. What kind of service do you offer?"

"I offer to arrange a quiet payment of damages to the owners of the other two cars, so you don't have to worry about eventual suits if they ever find out who side-swiped them. With a bonus tossed in to keep them from telling the cops there'd been a contact. And to make the same kind of arrange-

ment with John Lischer. I warn you in advance that part will cost plenty, because on top of whatever I can get him to agree to for damages, he'll have to be paid to keep it from the cops that there's been a settlement. I'll also take care of having your car repaired safely."

"Why can't you do just the last part?" she asked. "If no one ever discovers it was my car, why should we risk contacting the other people?"

"I'm thinking of your interest," I said. "Once there's a settlement, even a secret one, none of the other parties will press charges in the event the police ever catch up with you. Because I'll get quitclaim agreements from all of them. Then if you do get caught, the probability is the cops won't press charges on their own. And even if they do, proof that you made cash settlements with all the injured parties will be an extenuating circumstance. I doubt that any judge would give you more than a token fine and suspend your driver's license for six months. But without settling, you're in for a jail sentence if you ever get caught."

"I see." Her brow puckered in a slight frown. "And you say you can get my car repaired safely?"

"Safely," I assured her.

"How? I wouldn't care to have some shady repairman work on it. All he'd have to do is check the license plate like you did, and be all set for a little blackmail."

"I said safely. Does your husband ever go out of town?"

"He flies to New York this coming Monday. A banker's convention. He'll be gone a full week."

"What time's he leave?"

"Six P.M. from the airport."

"Fine," I said. "As soon as it's dark Monday night, I'll pick up the car and drive it to Kansas City. I'll switch plates and take it to a garage where I can get fast service. By the time your husband gets back from New York, your car will be back in the garage as good as new. Meantime, between now and Monday, I'll arrange settlements with John Lischer and the other two car owners."

She thought it over. Finally she said, "What is your fee?"

"Five thousand dollars," I said.

She didn't even blink. "I see. You're a rather expensive man, Mr. Calhoun."

I shrugged.

"And if I refuse to engage you?"

I said, "I have my duty as a citizen."

"How would you explain to the police keeping silent thirty-seven hours?"

"I'd phone and ask why they haven't acknowledged my letter," I said blandly. "I was quite drunk that night. Too drunk for it to occur to me I ought to tell the police at the scene I had seen your license number. But the very next morning I wrote them a letter. Letters can get lost in the mail."

She nodded slightly. "I guess you're in a pretty good bargaining position, Mr. Calhoun. But I have one more question. Suppose this John Lischer insists on as much as a five-thousand-dollar settlement? With your fee, that would run the amount up to ten thousand. Where do you suggest I get that much money?"

I looked at her in surprise. "With this home and with three cars in the garage, I assume you're not exactly a pauper."

"No," she admitted. "My husband is quite wealthy. And I can have all the money I want for any purpose I want just by asking. The only catch is I have to tell what it's for. I haven't a cent of my own except a checking account which currently contains about five hundred dollars. I could get the money by telling my husband what it's for, but if I did that I wouldn't need your services. I'm not afraid of the police. The sole reason I'm willing to engage you is to prevent my husband from finding out I wasn't home in bed at the time of the accident."

"Think up some other excuse. A charity donation, for instance."

She shook her head. "My husband handles all our charity donations personally. There simply isn't any excuse I could give him. If I told him I wanted a ten-thousand-dollar launch, he'd tell me to order it and have the company bill him. He wouldn't give me the money

for it. I've never in my life asked him for more than a couple of hundred dollars in cash."

I said, "Then hit your boy friend. Harry Cushman's got a couple of odd million lying around, last I heard, and nothing to spend it on except alimony and nightclubbing."

She looked thoughtful. "Yes, I suppose that would work. Harry wouldn't want publicity any more than I would. Shall I ask him for a check?"

"Cash," I said.

"I'll phone him as soon as you leave. Suppose you come back about this same time tomorrow?"

"Fine," I said. It sounded like a dismissal, so I got to my feet.

She gave me an impersonal nod of good-by. She was leaning forward and reaching behind her back to untie my square knot when I walked out of the room.

4

The next day was Thursday. At noon I phoned City Hospital and learned John Lischer's condition was charted as unchanged. Two hours later the colored maid Alice again let me into the foyer of the Powers home.

This time, instead of making me wait while she checked with her mistress, she merely said, "Mrs. Powers is expecting you, sir," walked off and let me find my own way to the sun porch.

Thick carpeting in the big living room and dining room muffled my

footsteps so that Mrs. Powers couldn't hear me coming. I stopped at the open door of the sun porch.

Perhaps Mrs. Powers was expecting me, but apparently she had also expected the maid at least to announce my arrival, because she wasn't exactly dressed for company. As yesterday, she was stretched out in one of the deck chairs with sun flooding her body. Her eyes were closed, though she didn't seem to be asleep, and she wore nothing but a bra and a pair of yellow shorts as brief as the red ones she had worn the previous day.

A man can stand only so much temptation. When she looked up at me with no expression whatever on her face, I dropped a hand on each of her smooth shoulders, pulled her against my chest and kissed her.

She made no resistance, but she made no response either. She just stood there, her lips soft but unmoving, and her eyes wide open. After a moment I pushed her away.

"Was your mother frightened by an ice cube?" I growled at her.

"Maybe you're just not the man to melt the ice, Mr. Calhoun."

Turning, she padded across the enclosed porch on bare feet to a small table. A brightly-colored straw bag lay on the table, and she removed a banded sheaf of currency from it.

"Your fee," she said, returning and handing me the money. "One hundred fifties."

"How about the settlement?"

"We don't know what that's going to amount to, do we?" she said. "Harry wants to see the agreements releasing me from further claims in writing before he pays any more money. When you bring me those, I'll see that you get whatever money the agreements call for."

"Harry is smarter than I thought he was," I remarked.

I riffled through the bills enough to make sure they were all fifties, then stuffed them in a pocket without counting them. "I'll pay my personal expenses and the car repairs out of this, and you can pay me back when it's all over."

Without comment she returned to her deck chair.

"I'll try to have all three agreements drawn up by tomorrow," I said. "Is it all right if I take them directly to Cushman for approval instead of bringing them here?"

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I'd like to get that part of it settled before I take off with the car. So I won't be in quite so much of a jam in case I get picked up driving it. By the time I deliver the agreements to you, you relay them on to Cushman and I call to get them back again, it will already be Monday."

After reflecting she said, "I suppose that will be all right. I'll phone Harry to expect you sometime tomorrow."

"I'll pick up the car about eight thirty Monday night. Leave the

garage unlocked and the keys in the car."

"Hadn't I better phone you first?" she asked. "Suppose Lawrence changed his mind at the last minute and didn't go?"

"Yeah," I said after a moment's thought. "Maybe you better." I gave her my home number.

5.

My plan was to contact the injured John Lischer before I got in touch with either of the other two men, as there would be no point in trying to settle with the others at all if Lischer refused to co-operate. But before even doing that, I decided it would be smart to find out just how much of an interest the police were taking in the case.

In St. Louis the Homicide Squad investigates all hit-and-runs in which there's personal injury, even if the injury isn't serious. This procedure is based on the sound theory that if unexpected complications happen to develop and the accident victim dies, Homicide has been on the case from the beginning and doesn't have to pick up a cold trail.

So I dropped in on Lieutenant Ben Simmons, head of the St. Louis Homicide Squad.

I found him alone in Room 405, morosely going over a stack of case records. Ben Simmons is a big man, nearly as big as I am, with an air of restrained energy about him. He hates desk work, which makes

up a good part of his job, and usually's glad of any excuse to postpone it. While we're friendly enough, we've never been intimate pals, but because my arrival gave him an excuse to push his case records aside, he looked up at me almost with relief.

"Hi, Barney," he said. "Pull up a cigarette and sit down. I was just getting ready to take a break."

Sliding a chair over to one side of his desk, I produced a pack, offered him a cigarette and flipped another in my own mouth. He furnished the fire.

Simmons leaned back in his chair and blew an appreciative shaft of smoke across the desk. "If you came in to report a corpse, walk right out again. I'm up to my neck now."

"Just killing time," I said. "Thought maybe I could dig up a client from among your unsolved cases. I haven't had a job in five weeks."

The lieutenant laughed. Regular cops always seem to get a kick out of hearing a private cop isn't doing so well.

"You should have stayed on the force," he said. "Probably you'd have been a sergeant by now."

"Probably I'd still be pounding a beat. Anything interesting stirring?"

"In unsolveds? A stickup killing and a hit-and-run is all. Unless you want to look up some of the old ones from years back."

"What's the hit-and-run?"

I asked. "Any insurance companies involved?"

"Not for the dead guy. He didn't have any insurance. There was a little property damage covered by insurance, but not enough to pay the insurance company to hire a private eye to track down the hit-and-runner."

Apparently he was talking about a different case, I thought, since John Lischer hadn't either been dead or in any immediate danger of dying when I'd last checked City Hospital at noon that day.

I said, "You've only got one unsolved hit-and-run?"

"At the moment. And this one I was hoping I could turn over. The thing happened about one A.M. Tuesday morning, and the guy's condition was listed as fair up until one P.M. today. Then he suddenly conked out. I just got the call an hour ago."

I felt my insides turn cold. Forcing my tone to remain only politely interested, I asked, "Who was he?"

"Old fellow named John Lischer. All he had was a fractured hip, but he was pushing eighty and I guess he couldn't stand the shock. His heart gave out."

I went on calmly puffing my cigarette, but my mind was racing. Up to this moment my actions in the case hadn't been exactly ethical, but the most I'd been risking was my license. Once I had succeeded in arriving at settlements with the three injured parties, there wasn't

much likelihood I'd get into serious trouble for not reporting what I knew to the police, even if the whole story eventually came out.

But the unexpected death of John Lischer changed the whole picture. Suddenly, instead of merely being guilty of somewhat unethical practice, I was an accessory to homicide. For in Missouri hit-and-run driving resulting in death is manslaughter, and carries a penalty of from three months to ten years.

I asked casually, "Got any leads on the case?"

"A little green paint and a bumper guard. Enough to identify the car as a green Buick."

That did it, I thought. So much for Mrs. Powers's assurance that she'd left no clues at the scene of the crime. With the case now a homicide instead of merely a hit-and-run, there'd be a statewide alert for a damaged green Buick. Even Kansas City wouldn't be safe.

Somehow I managed to get through another five minutes of idle conversation with Ben Simmons. Then I pushed myself erect with simulated laziness.

"I guess I won't pick up any nickels here," I said. "See you around."

"Sure," the lieutenant said. "Drop in any time."

It was four o'clock when I left Headquarters. I debated returning to the Powers home at once, then decided it was too close to the time Mr. Powers would be getting home

from the bank. Instead I phoned from a pay station.

The colored maid Alice answered the phone, but Mrs. Powers came on almost immediately.

"Barney Calhoun," I said. "There's been a development. I have to see both you and Cushman at once."

"Now?" she asked. "I expect my husband home within an hour."

"Arrange some excuse with Alice. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't urgent. Can you get in touch with Cushman?"

"I suppose."

"Then both of you be at my place by a quarter of five. It's on Twentieth between Locust and Olive. West side of the street, just right of the alley. Lower right flat. Got it?"

"That isn't a very nice neighborhood," she said with a slight sniff.

"I'm not a very nice person," I told her, and hung up.

6.

Harry Cushman arrived first, coming in a taxi.

When I opened the door, he asked, "You're Calhoun?"

"Yeah," I said. "Come on in."

He didn't offer his hand. Following me into my small and not particularly well-furnished front room, he looked around superciliously, finally chose a straight-backed chair as the least likely piece of furniture to be contaminated.

"Helena said it was urgent," he said. "I hope you can make it fast. I have a five-thirty cocktail date."

It was the first time I had heard Mrs. Powers's first name. Helena Powers. Somehow it seemed to suit her calm and expressionless beauty.

I said, "Depends on how fast Helena gets here. What I have to say won't take long."

The buzzer sounded at that moment and I went to let Helena Powers in. Glancing past her at the curb, I saw she had come in the station wagon.

Harry Cushman rose when she came into the room, crossed and bent to kiss her. She turned her cheek, then moved away from him and took my easy chair with the broken spring. She was wearing a bright sun dress which left her shoulders bare, open-toed pumps and no stockings. Her jet-black hair was tied back with a red ribbon and she looked about sixteen years old.

Cushman returned to his chair.

Without preliminary I said, "John Lischer's dead."

Cushman stared at me with his mouth open. As usual Helena's face showed no expression.

"But you told Helena you'd been checking the hospital and his condition was listed as fair," Cushman said stupidly.

"His heart gave out. All he had was a fractured hip, but he was nearly eighty."

Helena asked in a calm voice, "How does this affect our arrangements?"

"It changes the whole picture," I told her. "You can't settle with a

corpse. If you get caught now, you'll be charged with manslaughter. You'll be charged even if you turn yourself in."

Harry Cushman's face was gray. "Listen, I can't afford to be accessory to a manslaughter."

"You already are," I informed him. "You were in the car that killed Lischer. If you didn't want to be an accessory, you should have reported to the cops at once." I let a little contempt creep into my voice. "Of course if you go to them right now, they'll probably let you off the hook because they'll be more interested in the driver. Mrs. Powers will take the rap . . . probably five years . . . and all you'll get is a little bad publicity."

He licked his lips and flicked his eyes at Helena, who stared back at him expressionlessly.

"Naturally we have to protect Helena," Cushman said with an effort to sound protective. "What's your suggestion?"

"They know it was a green Buick." I looked at Helena. "Your belief that you hadn't knocked anything loose was a little wrong. You left a bumper guard at the accident scene."

I turned my attention back to Cushman. "Now that it's classified as a homicide instead of just a hit-and-run, every repair garage in the state and halfway across Illinois will be alerted. The risk of getting the car fixed has at least tripled. And so has my fee. I want another ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand!" Cushman squeaked. "You agreed to five!"

"Not to help cover a homicide, I didn't. Make up your mind fast. Either it's fifteen grand or nothing. If you don't want to play, I'll hand back your five right now and call the police."

Both of them stared at me, Cushman with petulant belligerence and Helena with mild curiosity, as she might have examined an interesting bug on a flower.

Finally Helena's husky voice said, "I don't see what there is to argue about, Harry. Mr. Calhoun seems to be in a perfect bargaining position. He always seems to be in a perfect bargaining position."

Cushman sputtered and fumed for a few minutes more, but finally he agreed to deliver me ten thousand more in cash at noon the next day. The money didn't mean anything to him, of course, because he'd been left more millions than he could possibly spend in a lifetime, but I think he was beginning to wish he'd never heard of the beautiful Helena Powers. I could tell by the way he looked at her she held a terrific fascination for him, but I suspect he was beginning to wonder if she was worth the complications she was bringing into his life.

I didn't care what he thought so long as he came up with an additional ten thousand dollars.

7.

Hit-and-run deaths don't create

much newspaper stir in a city the size of St. Louis, particularly where the victim isn't important from a news point of view. The Friday papers carried a brief account of John Lischer's death and the statement that the police were searching for a green Buick damaged on the right side. The original report of the accident had been only a paragraph back in the stock market sections, but this appeared on the second page of both the *Post* and the *Globe*. Apparently there was a dearth of other news.

At noon Cushman brought me two more sheafs of fifty-dollar bills. I took them and the original packet down to my safe deposit vault, first transferring a thousand dollars to my wallet.

Then I relaxed for the weekend, resting up in the expectation of not getting any sleep at all Monday night.

At seven o'clock Monday evening Helena Powers phoned me to say her husband had caught his plane and the way was clear for me to pick up the Buick.

"The keys in the car?" I asked.

"No. Stop at the house for them. Alice isn't here and I'm all alone. No one will see you."

At eight-thirty, just as it was beginning to get dark, she opened the front door to my ring. She was wearing a plain street dress and a pert little straw hat, and she carried a light jacket over her arm. Silently she locked the door behind me, then

led me back to the kitchen, switching off lights as we passed through each room. On the kitchen table stood a small suitcase.

"You going somewhere?" I asked.

"With you," she said, giving me a deadpan look.

Setting down my own bag, I looked at her in astonishment. "Why?"

"Because I want to."

"I'll be gone nearly a week."

"I've made arrangements with Alice," she said. "She thinks I'm driving up to my sister's in Columbia. I gave her a week off."

"Suppose your husband tries to phone long distance and doesn't get any answer?"

"He never phones. He just writes a card every day when he's gone. And I never write back."

I shrugged. "It's your car. I guess you can ride in it if you want."

I picked up her bag and my own, waited while she flicked out the lights and opened the back door for me. Then I waited again while she locked the door behind us.

In the garage I set down the bags and asked her for the car keys. Silently she handed me a leather key case.

"Which is the trunk key?" I asked.

She pointed to one.

I slid it into the lock, but it wouldn't turn. I tried it upside down, but it wouldn't go in.

"The lock's jammed," I said.

Helena tried it with no more

success than I had. Finally she said, "I'm sure it's the right key," and looked puzzled.

"The devil with it," I said. "We haven't got that much luggage anyway."

I tossed our bags on the floor of the small back seat. The top of the convertible was still down, as it had been on the night of the accident, but I put it up before we started.

Apparently the only damage the car had suffered was body damage, because it drove perfectly. I noted with satisfaction the gas tank registered nearly three-fourths full, which should take us better than two hundred miles before we'd have to worry about refueling.

I didn't figure there was much risk of us being stopped even in St. Louis by some cruising patrol car, because it was now six days since the accident and four days since John Lischer had died. I knew a routine order would have been issued to all cars to look for a damaged green Buick, but I had also ridden patrol enough back in my police days to know that by now this order would be filed 'way at the back of most cruising cops' minds. They wouldn't actually be searching for the hit-and-run car to the extent of carefully looking over every green automobile they saw. Even if we ran into a cop and he noticed the damage, there was a good chance it wouldn't register on him immediately that our car was green or that it was a Buick.

It also helped that it was now dark and that the damage was all on the right side. Simply by keeping in the right-hand lane I could prevent any cars passing us in the same direction we were going from noticing it. The only real danger was in meeting a squad car coming from the opposite direction, for the front bumper was badly bent and the front right fender was crushed all out of shape.

To increase our odds, I skirted the congested part of town. My destination was Illinois, but instead of turning east, I took Lindell west to Skinker Boulevard, circled Washington University campus to Big Bend Road, turned right and drove north to the edge of town. Then I cut across to North Eighth, turned right again and headed toward McKinley Bridge.

Puzzled by this maneuvering, Helena said, "I thought we were going to Kansas City."

"That was before I was accessory to a homicide," I said. "We're going to Chicago."

"Chicago! That's three hundred miles!"

"K. C. is two fifty," I told her. "K. C. garages will be looking for a bent Buick. Chicago garages won't. We'll be there by morning."

At that moment we had a bad break. Up to now we hadn't seen a single radio car, but now, only five blocks from McKinley Bridge and relative safety, one suddenly appeared coming toward us. As it cruised by, it blinked on its highway

lights, then lowered them again.

With my heart in my mouth I wondered if the two patrolmen in the car had noticed our damaged right front. In the rear-view mirror I saw them swing in a U-turn and start back toward us. I had been traveling at twenty-five, but I risked increasing the speed to thirty.

A siren ground out a summons to halt.

For a wild moment I contemplated pushing the accelerator to the floor and running it out. Then I realized there wasn't any safe place to run. If I tried to dash over McKinley Bridge to Illinois, the cops would simply use the phone at this end of the bridge and we'd run into a block at the far toll gate. They'd have all the time in the world to set one up, because the Mississippi is nearly a mile wide at that point. And if I kept straight ahead instead of crossing the bridge, Eighth Street would shoot us into the most congested part of town.

I pulled over to the curb and stopped.

When the police car pulled next to us, neither cop got out. The one on the right said, "Haven't you got any dimmers on that thing, mister?"

At first his words failed to penetrate, because I was expecting some question about our smashed fender. Then I flicked my eyes at the dashboard and saw the small red light which indicated my highway lights were on. My left foot felt for the

floor switch and pressed it down.

"Sorry," I said. "I didn't notice I had the brights on."

The cop nodded peremptorily and the car swung left in another U-turn to go back the way it had been going. With shaking fingers I lighted a cigarette before starting on.

8.

We had no trouble at the bridge. If the toll collector had been instructed to watch for a damaged green Buick, he wasn't watching very carefully, because he didn't even glance at our right front fender. Of course he approached the car from my side, but even then he couldn't have failed to notice the damage if he'd looked across the hood.

Then we were in Venice, Illinois.

I took 66, driving along at a steady fifty-five so as not to risk getting picked up for speeding. We hit Springfield about eleven-thirty and I drove aimlessly up and down side streets for a few minutes.

"What are you doing now?" Helena asked.

"We need gas."

"We passed a station right in the center of town."

"I know," I said. "But we're not going to leave any record of a banged-up green Buick with Missouri plates stopping anywhere for gas. The alert won't reach as far as Chicago for a mere hit-and-run homicide, but it's sure to have gone this far."

Finally I found what I wanted. A car parked on a side street where all the houses in the block were dark. Pulling up next to it on the wrong side of the street, I got out, reached in back for my bag, opened it and drew out a length of hose.

Helena watched silently as I siphoned gas from the parked car into the Buick's tank.

When we were on the way again she remarked, "I'd never have thought of that. I'm beginning to think you earn your money, Mr. Calhoun."

"Why so formal?" I asked. "My name's Barney."

In the darkness I could see her looking at me sidewise. "All right, Barney," she said after a moment.

We stopped for gas once more in Bloomington, getting it by the same method. Then we didn't stop again until we hit the outskirts of Chicago at seven A.M.

As I began to slow down with the intention of turning in at a truck stop, Helena said, "What do we want here?"

"Breakfast," I said.

"Shouldn't we rent a couple of cabins before we do anything else?"

"No," I said. "We've got several more important things to do first."

By the time we had finished breakfast at the truck stop it was eight, and by the time we got far enough into town to begin to run into small neighborhood businesses, barber shops were open. I accomplished the second of the more im-

portant things we had to do by getting a shave.

"Couldn't that have waited?" Helena complained when I rejoined her.

"I have to look respectable for my next stop," I told her.

Heading in the general direction of the Loop, I drove until I spotted a sign reading "Car Rentals." I parked half a block beyond it.

"Just wait here," I instructed Helena. "When I come by in another car, follow me."

As usual she showed no surprise. As I got out of the car she slid over into the driver's seat.

The car rental place didn't have exactly what I wanted, but it was close enough. I would have preferred a Buick coupe or convertible the same color as Helena's, but the man didn't have any Buicks. I settled for a Dodge coupe a shade darker green than the convertible. The rate was five dollars a day plus eight cents a mile, and I told the man I wanted it for a week. I gave him the name Henry Graves, a Detroit address and left a seventy-five dollar deposit.

Only ten minutes after I had left her I pulled up alongside Helena in the Dodge, honked the horn and pulled away again. In the rear-view mirror I could see her pull out to follow me.

I led her back to the southwest edge of town, found a street which seemed relatively deserted and parked. Helena parked behind me.

In the trunk of the rented car I found a screwdriver and a pair of pliers. Helena watched with her customary lack of expression as I switched plates on the two cars.

Then she said, "I don't think I understand."

"Probably an unnecessary precaution, because I'm sure repair garages this far from St. Louis won't be watching for a green Buick. But up here a Missouri plate stands out more than an Illinois one. Now when I take this thing in to be fixed, it'll just be another local car. And on the off chance there's ever a check to find out who it belonged to, the license won't lead anywhere except to a car rental outfit and a non-existent guy named Henry Graves of Detroit."

Her lip corners quirked ever so slightly. "You think of everything, don't you, Barney?"

"I try to," I told her. "I'll drive the Buick now, and you follow me in the Dodge. Next stop is a repair garage."

She remained where she was. In her husky but slightly flat voice she said, "Let's get settled in cabins first. I want a bath and a change of clothes."

"It won't take an hour to locate a garage and make arrangements," I argued.

She shook her head. "We've been here over two hours now. I wanted a cabin at seven, but I waited while you fed yourself, got a shave, rented a car and changed plates. I'm not

waiting another minute." She looked at me serenely and added, "Besides, they take your license number at tourist courts. We'll have to drive in with the Buick."

She was right, I realized on reflection. We should have signed in somewhere before I changed the plates, as I didn't want the Missouri plates which were now on the Dodge listed even on a tourist court's records. Disconsolately I considered the prospect of having to change the plates back again, then decided it wasn't necessary. There wasn't much danger in letting some tourist court proprietor see the damaged Buick so long as it didn't have its own plates on it.

"You win," I said. "Follow me again."

Helena shook her head again. "You follow me this time. I saw just the court I want when we came in on 66. Maybe you're smart on some things, but I prefer to trust my own judgment on a place to sleep."

Shrugging, I climbed back in the Dodge and waited for her to start the procession.

Helena drove nearly ten miles out of town on 66, passing a half dozen motels which looked adequate to me before pulling off to the side of the road suddenly and parking. I parked behind her.

"Lock it up," she called back to me.

Winding the windows shut, I got out and locked the Dodge. When I

slid into the Buick next to her, she pointed through the windshield toward a large tourist court about a hundred yards ahead on the opposite side of the road.

"That's the one. Isn't it nice?"

It didn't look any different to me than the half dozen others we'd passed, except that this one had open front stalls for automobiles.

"It's lovely," I growled. "Let's get it over with."

9.

The place was called the Starview Motor Court and advertised hot baths and steam heat. Since the temperature hovered around eighty, neither seemed like much of an inducement to me.

Though it was probably an unnecessary precaution, I had Helena swing the car so that the left side was toward the office. With dozens of different automobiles driving in and out of the court daily, it wasn't likely the proprietor would notice our green Buick convertible had changed to a green Dodge coupe a few hours after we checked in, but there wasn't any point in deliberately calling attention to our smashed fender. Just possibly it would catch his notice enough to make it register on him.

The proprietor was a sad-faced man in his fifties who had an equally sad-faced wife. They occupied quarters behind the small office. For some reason both of them went along to show us cabins.

They were nice modern cabins, clean and airy and walled with knotty pine. The baths were large instead of the usual tiny affairs you find at most tourist courts, and contained combination bathtubs and showers.

"We'll take two," I told the proprietor. "We'll be here a week, so I'll pay the full week now. How much?"

He said the normal rate was nine dollars a day, but as a weekly rate we could have them for fifty-six dollars each. "With another fifty cent a day knocked off if you do your own cleaning instead of having maid service," he added.

Helena surprised me by saying she preferred to do the cleaning herself, which caused the proprietor's wife to give her a pleased smile. Apparently the wife constituted the maid service.

Helena stayed outside when I went back to the office to register. I signed as Howard Bliss and sister, Benton, Illinois, and listed the Illinois license number registered to the Dodge. Then I paid him a hundred and five dollars.

Our cabins were numbers six and seven. When I got outside again, I discovered Helena had backed the Buick into the car port between them while I was registering.

"You could have left it in front of the cabins," I said to her. "We aren't going to be here long."

"We'll be here at least a half hour. I told you I'm going to take a bath."

"Several times," I said wearily. "Which cabin do you want?"

She looked at both speculatively. The one on the right went with the car port we were using, because a door near the rear wall of the port led into the cabin.

Helena said, "I'll take the right one."

Getting her bag from the car, I carried it into the right-hand cabin via the car port door and set it on her bed. Then I got my own bag from the car and went into my own cabin.

Inasmuch as I was going to have to kill a half hour anyway, I decided to take a cold shower myself. I took my time under the water, letting its coldness knock the tiredness out of my muscles and wash some of the sleepiness from my eyes. Twenty-five minutes later, refreshed and in clean clothes, I knocked at the next cabin door.

"Just a minute," Helena called. "I'm still dressing."

It was closer to ten minutes before she appeared, and meantime I stood out in the sun letting the heat wilt my collar and undo all the good a cold shower had done me. When she finally appeared she was dressed in a white sun dress, low-heeled sandals which exposed bare, red-tipped toes, and no hat. Her long hair was pulled up in a pony tail.

Carefully she locked her cabin door behind her and dropped the key in a straw purse.

This time I drove the Buick.

When we pulled up alongside the parked Dodge, I handed her the keys to it.

"Instead of following you, suppose we arrange to meet somewhere?" Helena suggested. "I'd like to do a little shopping."

"You know Chicago?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Then we'll make it somewhere simple." I looked at my watch, noting it was nearly ten A.M. "The Statler Cocktail Lounge at two P.M.?"

"All right."

"Be careful you don't get picked up for anything," I cautioned. "Even a parking ticket would put us in the soup with that Missouri plate on the Dodge."

"I'll be careful."

I drove off while she was unlocking the coupe door.

I didn't have any trouble arranging for the car to be fixed. I stopped at the first Buick service garage I saw.

The chief repairman, a cheerful middle-aged man, carefully looked over the damage. "What's the other guy look like?" he asked.

"There wasn't any other guy," I told him. "My wife mistook a tree next to our drive for the garage."

He told me he could do the whole job, including a check of wheel alignment, in three days for approximately a hundred dollars.

"That's a rough estimate, you understand," he said. "May vary a few bucks one way or the other."

I gave him the name George Seaward and a South Chicago address a couple of miles from the repair garage. When he asked for my phone number, I said I didn't have a phone and just to hold the car when it was finished until I picked it up.

My business was all completed by noon and suddenly I was exhausted from lack of sleep and the strain of driving three hundred miles at night. I began to wish I had arranged to meet Helena at twelve-thirty instead of at two.

There was nothing to do but kill two hours, however. I took a taxi to the Statler, had lunch and then slowly sipped four highballs in the cocktail lounge while I waited for her. She showed up at ten after two.

"Want a drink?" I asked. "Or shall we go back to the court and collapse? I'm ready to fall on my face."

She looked me over consideringly. "You do look tired," she said. "We'll pick up a couple of bottles of bourbon and some soda on the way and I'll have my drink at the court. Maybe we can get some ice from the proprietor."

My four drinks had relaxed me just enough so that I had difficulty keeping my eyes open. I let Helena drive.

I was just beginning to drift off to sleep sitting up when the car braked to a stop, then backed into a parking place at the curb. I opened my eyes to see we were in front of a liquor store.

Reluctantly I climbed out of the car. "You say bourbon?" I asked Helena.

When she merely nodded, I went on into the store. I bought two quarts of bourbon and a six-bottle carry-pack of soda.

When I raised the Dodge's trunk lid to stow away my purchases, I was surprised to find the floor of the trunk was soaking wet. There hadn't been any water on it when I had searched the trunk for tools to change license plates.

But I was too sleepy to wonder about it much. Slamming the lid shut, I climbed back in the car and let myself sink into a semi-coma again. Helena had to shake me awake when we got back to the tourist court.

I slept straight through until eight o'clock that night. Presumably Helena did the same, for when I finally looked outside to peer next door, her cabin was dark and the Dodge was still in its car port. She must have awakened about the same time I did, though, because she knocked at my door just as I finished dressing.

She was carrying the two bottles of bourbon and the carry-pack of soda.

"I thought we'd have a drink before we went out for dinner," she said.

I found two glasses in the bathroom, but the prospect of warm bourbon and soda didn't appeal to me.

"I'll see if I can get some ice at the office," I said.

But the proprietor told me he was sorry, they had only enough ice for their personal needs. When I returned to the cabin, I suggested we have our before-dinner drink at the same place we picked to eat.

"Maybe I can get some ice from him," Helena said.

A drink didn't mean that much to me, but since she seemed so set on one, I didn't argue. From my open door I watched as she moved toward the office. The movement walking gave to her body would have made a corpse sit up in his casket. It occurred to me the motel proprietor would have to be made of ice himself to refuse her.

In a few moments she reappeared carrying a china water pitcher.

She stopped at her own cabin door, said to me, "I'll be with you in a minute, Barney," unlocked the door and went inside.

What she was going into her cabin for, I couldn't decide, because when she reappeared a few moments later, she still carried nothing but the pitcher. Carefully she locked the door behind her and came over to my door. When she handed me the pitcher I saw it was full of cracked ice instead of cubes.

"What's he have, an old-fashioned icebox?" I asked in surprise.

"I didn't inquire," Helena said. "I just asked for ice."

We had two highballs each before going out to hunt a place for dinner.

10.

We dined at a place called the *White Swan*, a roadhouse about a half mile from the tourist court on route 66. The place had an orchestra and after dinner we alternately danced and sat at the bar until two A.M. And every time I took her in my arms, my temperature went up another degree.

I got the impression the closeness of our bodies on the dance floor was beginning to have an effect on her too. Not from anything she said, for we did remarkably little talking during the evening, but each time we danced she seemed to move more compliantly into my arms and her eyes seemed to develop a warmer shine.

When I finally drove the Dodge back into the car port, I was on the verge of suggesting she come into my cabin for a nightcap, but before I could open my mouth Helena jumped out of the car and entered her cabin by means of the car port door without saying a word to me.

Then, as I sat there foolishly looking at her closed door, I experienced a terrific letdown. I was tempted to get angry, but on reflection I realized she hadn't actually said or done anything to make me think she had been sharing my own cozy thoughts. Maybe she just realized the direction my thoughts were taking, and wanted to leave no doubts in my mind that our relationship was strictly a business one.

Shrugging, I locked the Dodge and went into my own cabin.

Five minutes later, just as I finished pulling on my pajamas, there was a knock at the door. I put on a robe and opened it to find Helena standing there with her suitcase in her hand.

When I had stared at her expressionless face without saying anything for nearly a minute, she asked, "Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Sure," I said, recovering my wits enough to step aside.

Walking past me, she set the suitcase on a chair, opened it and drew out a nearly transparent nylon nightgown. Then she turned and, holding the nightgown out in front of her, examined it critically.

Her husky but flat voice said, "I'm frightened all alone over there. Am I welcome here?"

I didn't answer because I was afraid my voice would shake. I merely closed the door, which up till then I had been too stupefied to shut, locked it and unsteadily poured out two substantial shots of bourbon.

The ice in the pitcher had all melted by now, but I needed mine straight anyway.

II.

The next three days were like a honeymoon. We didn't have a thing to do but wait for the Buick to be repaired, so we simply relaxed and enjoyed ourselves. With Helena doing the housework, which consisted

only of making the bed, emptying ash trays and washing our whisky glasses, we weren't even disturbed by the proprietor's wife coming in to clean. Daily we slept till noon, then showered, had a leisurely lunch and spent the rest of the day at the beach.

Evenings we spent dancing and drinking at the *White Swan*.

In looking back I can see that Helena's attraction for me was almost entirely physical, because except for her beauty and an unexpected fiery passion, she wasn't a very stimulating companion. We had almost no conversation aside from routine discussions of our plans for each day, and aside from such physical pleasures as sunbathing, dancing, drinking and love making, I don't believe she had a single interest.

Two things about her puzzled me. One was her disappearance for a short time every morning. I would awaken about eight A.M. to find myself alone, drift back to sleep and a short time later be awakened again by her climbing back in bed. Her explanation was that she had to have breakfast coffee but didn't want to disturb me, so she dressed and drove down the road to a diner alone.

The other thing that puzzled me was her ability to get ice from the motel proprietor. Both Wednesday and Thursday noon as soon as she was dressed, she left the cabin carrying the china water pitcher and re-

turned with it full of cracked ice. But when on Friday I happened to get dressed first and took the pitcher to the office while Helena was still under the shower, the proprietor gave me an irritated look and told me he'd already informed me once he didn't supply ice for guests.

When I returned empty handed, Helena took the pitcher and came back with it full five minutes later.

Friday afternoon I had Helena drive me to the Buick repair garage and discovered the convertible was all ready. The bill was a hundred and fifteen dollars.

"I had to put on a new bumper bracket," the chief repairman said. "Could have straightened the other, but it would have left it weak. I put the old one in your trunk."

"How'd you manage that?" I asked. "The lock was jammed last I tried it."

"Ain't now." He demonstrated by walking behind the car, inserting a key and turning it. The lid raised without difficulty. He locked it again and handed me the keys.

I tried the trunk key myself and it worked perfectly.

When I drove out of the service garage Helena was waiting for me in the Dodge a half block away. Again I led the way to a quiet side street, where we stopped long enough for me to switch plates back to the right cars. Then I took the Dodge and Helena followed in the Buick while I drove to the car rental lot.

I had thirty-four dollars coming back from the seventy-five I'd deposited.

As we drove back toward the tourist court I said, "We may as well start back tonight. We can have the car back in your garage by tomorrow morning."

Helena didn't say anything at the moment. She waited until we were back in my cabin and I had mixed a couple of drinks.

Then she said, "There's one other little job we have to do before we go back to St. Louis, Barney."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Drink your drink first, then I'll show you."

"Show me?" I asked, puzzled. "Why can't you just tell me?"

"Drink your drink," she repeated.

She sounded as though she meant I might need it. I looked at her dubiously for a minute, then drained my glass.

"All right," I said. "I drank my drink. Now show me."

Setting down her own drink unfinished, she took my hand and led me to the door. Still holding my hand, she led me to her own cabin door, unlocked it and drew me inside. Then she released her grip on me and locked the door behind us.

"It's in the bathroom," she said.

Now completely puzzled, I followed her. In the bathroom the shower curtains were drawn around the bathtub and a glittering new icepick lay on the edge of the washbowl. Without comment Helena

drew the shower curtains wide.

Three damp burlap bags were spread over something bulky in the bathtub.

For a few moments I simply stared at the bags, the hair at the base of my neck prickling in anticipation of shock. Then I pushed Helena aside and lifted one of the pieces of burlap.

Underneath, cozily packed in what must have been more than a hundred pounds of cracked ice, was the naked body of a man. He lay on his side, his knees drawn up to his chest and his back to me. The back of his head was oddly flattened and was matted with dried blood.

Letting the burlap fall back into place, I staggered out of the room and collapsed in a chair in the bedroom. Helena followed as far as the bathroom door, then stood watching me with curiously bright eyes as I stared at her in stupefaction.

Finally I managed to whisper, "Who is it?"

"Lawrence," she said without emotion. "My husband."

I closed my eyes and tried to make some sense out of the nightmarish discovery that Lawrence Powers, who was supposed to be at a banker's convention in New York City, was actually lying dead in an improvised icebox not a dozen feet away. Surprisingly it did make sense. Like the tumblers of a lock falling into place, various oddities in Helena's behavior which had been vaguely puzzling me ever since we started the

trip began to develop meaning.

Opening my eyes, I said in a dazed voice, "He was in the trunk all the way from St. Louis, wasn't he? That's why the key wouldn't work. You substituted some other key so I couldn't open the trunk, then put the right one back on the ring after you got his body out of the trunk and into your cabin."

"It was the key to the trunk of Lawrence's Packard you tried in the lock that first time," she said calmly. "I had the Buick trunk key in my purse."

"And that's why you insisted on this particular tourist court," I went on. "You wanted one with car ports, so you could get him out of the trunk and into your cabin without being seen. You dragged him in through the car port door while I was taking a shower."

She shrugged. "He wasn't very heavy. A hundred and forty. I weigh one twenty-five myself."

Leaning forward, I put my head in my hands and mumbled, "Tell me the rest of it."

Without a trace of emotion in her voice she said, "While you were arranging for the Buick to be fixed I located an ice house only two miles from here. I thought of ice because I knew he'd begin to smell after a few days if he wasn't preserved. I had the man put four twenty-five pound pieces of ice in the trunk of the Dodge. He also sold me an ice-pick. Then I came back here and carried the pieces in one at a time.

I left the plug out of the bathtub so the melted ice would run away, and I've been adding fifty pounds a day. I got it while you were still in bed and thought I was out after coffee." She paused, then added, "The bur-lap bags were in our garage at home. I put them on the floor of the trunk in case he bled any."

I thought of something. "Good God!" I said. "All you borrowed from the motel proprietor was an empty pitcher. The ice for our drinks has been coming out of that bath-tub!"

When her lip corners quirked upward in the suggestion of a smile, I got to my feet, reeled into the bathroom and threw up.

When I returned to the bedroom Helena had seated herself on the bed and was serenely smoking a cigarette.

"Tell me how it happened," I suggested dully.

"He was going to call the police," she said. "It was all because he insisted on getting everywhere early. His plane didn't leave until six, and I planned to start driving him to the airport at five. But he was all packed and ready to go before four. I intended taking the station wagon, figuring I'd make some excuse if he asked why I wasn't driving the Buick. But Lawrence tried to be helpful. Without my knowing what he intended doing, he went out to the garage at four o'clock and backed the convertible out for me."

She paused to crush out her ciga-

rette and light another. "When I heard the car start up, I rushed out back to stop him. I did get him to drive it back in the garage, but it was too late. He'd already noticed the damage. And he guessed at once what had caused it. He used to read every inch of both papers, so he knew the police were looking for a green Buick. He didn't even ask me. He just looked at me in a horrified way and said, 'Helena, you killed that old man.'"

She blew twin streams of smoke from her nostrils, creating a curious mental impression on me. With her immobile face and motionless body, the smoke issuing from her nostrils made her look like a carved oriental idol.

Tonelessly she went on, "There wasn't any reasoning with him, Barney. He was the most self-righteous man who ever lived. It didn't mean a thing to him that I might go to jail for months or years if I was discovered. I actually pleaded with him, but he was determined to phone the police. We have five phone extensions and one of them is in the garage. He marched over to it like an avenging angel and was dialing *O* when I picked up a wrench and hit him over the back of the head."

I said huskily, "Why'd you wait until now to mention all this? Why not before we started for Chicago?"

"Because I wanted to make sure you'd help me get rid of the body," she said serenely. "I wouldn't have

the faintest idea how to dispose of it myself. And you might have backed out of the whole deal if you'd known about Lawrence."

"What makes you think I won't anyway?" I asked. "I'm not an accessory to this yet. Suppose I just walk out?"

Helena yawned slightly. "Then I suppose I'd be caught. But I doubt that the police would believe you knew nothing about it. I'd tell them it was you who killed Lawrence, of course. And even if they didn't believe me, they'd certainly never accept your story that you had nothing at all to do with it. Particularly after the motel proprietor identified you as the man who'd been with me."

She was right, I knew. No cop would ever believe I'd transported a body three hundred miles without knowing it, or that the woman I was traveling with had kept it on ice in her bathtub for three days without my knowledge. I had to save Helena in order to save myself.

If it was possible to save either of us.

I didn't waste any time upbraiding her. In the first place it wouldn't have accomplished anything, and in the second place I didn't think it would bother her in the least.

"Let's go over to my cabin where I can think," I said wearily.

I spent the next twenty minutes thinking, pacing up and down and chain smoking while Helena calmly watched me and sipped a highball. I

had one straight shot myself. I would have preferred a highball, but I refused to use any more of Helena's ice.

Finally I stopped pacing and faced her. "Look," I said. "I think I've figured out how to get rid of him, but before we even discuss that, we've got to plan a story to cover you. When your husband doesn't show up Monday, you're going to have to act as a normal wife would. First phone his bank to ask if they've heard from him. Then on Tuesday wire convention headquarters in New York. They'll wire back that he never showed, of course. Soon as you get that wire, you'll have to phone the police and put on a worried wife act. Think you can manage all that?"

She nodded indifferently.

"Then the hard part will start. First the police will discover he never caught that plane, so they'll know he disappeared in St. Louis . . ."

"I thought of that two minutes after I killed him," Helena interrupted. "He'll be listed on the flight."

I stared at her. "How?"

"It was only four when all this happened," she said. "By four twenty I had Lawrence stripped, his clothes hidden in the garage and his body in the car trunk. Then I went back inside, told Alice I wouldn't be home for dinner after I took Mr. Powers to the airport, and she could go home. I also told her I

intended driving up to my sister's in Columbia the next morning, so she could take the week off. I had her out of the house by four thirty."

"How'd that get your husband listed on the plane flight he was supposed to take?" I asked.

"I haven't finished. As soon as Alice left I phoned Harry Cushman. He took a taxi to the house, picked up Lawrence's ticket and plane reservation and went straight to the airport. He flew to New York under Lawrence's name and took another plane back under a different name as soon as he arrived. When the police start looking for Lawrence, they'll start looking in New York."

12.

For a long time I looked at her in wonderment. Finally I asked, "How'd you ever talk Cushman into doing a silly thing like that?"

"Silly?"

"Naturally the police will question the airline personnel," I said patiently. "The minute they get Cushman's description from the stewardess, they'll know somebody substituted on the flight for your husband."

She shook her head. "In the first place, neither Lawrence nor Harry is known on the New York run. Lawrence often flies to Washington, but almost never to New York. I know he hasn't made the trip in three years. And Harry never flies anywhere. In the second place, though Harry is ten years younger

than Lawrence was and twenty pounds heavier, a rough description of either would fit the other. Both have light hair, neither is grey, both have lean builds and both wear small mustaches. In the third place the police won't question the stewardess too closely. Just enough to satisfy themselves Lawrence was on the plane."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because they won't suspect murder. The first thing the police do when a banker disappears is request an audit of bank funds."

She was right again, I realized. The probability was the first premise the police would work on was that Lawrence Powers had disappeared voluntarily. And by the time a bank audit disclosed he hadn't absconded with any funds, the trail would be too cold to pick up.

I said, "I still don't understand how you talked Cushman into sticking his neck out."

"He's in love with me," she said complacently.

I studied her broodingly, not satisfied with the answer. "Look, Helena, if I'm going to help cover up your murders, I want the whole story. Maybe Cushman's in love with you, but he was in a blue funk over being accessory to mere manslaughter. I don't think he'd stick his neck out for first degree homicide even for you."

She shrugged. "Of course Harry doesn't know Lawrence is dead."

Again I studied her broodingly.

Finally I asked in an exasperated tone, "What in the devil story *did* you tell him?"

"You don't have to shout," she said. "I told him Lawrence had discovered the damage to the car and guessed what caused it. I said he had threatened to call the police, but I explained to him I'd already hired a private detective to try to arrange a quiet settlement of damages, and I talked him into holding off calling the police at least until he'd discussed it with you. I said Lawrence and I went to see you at your flat, and you and Lawrence had a fight. You knocked him out and tied him up. I told Harry this was the opportunity to accomplish everything we'd planned together. For me to obtain grounds for divorce against Lawrence and marry him."

"How did that follow?" I asked, fascinated.

"I told Harry you had agreed to hold Lawrence captive until we could get the car fixed. Then, after it was back in the garage, you'd transport Lawrence to New York in a private plane owned by a friend of yours and turn him loose in the city unshaven and in dirty clothes. When Lawrence took his story to the police, they'd think he was crazy. The flight list would show he'd flown to New York as scheduled, and when he walked into a New York police station, he'd look like he'd been on a several-day drunk. When the police came to check my car, they'd find it un-

damaged. Then I'd announce my husband had been suffering delusions about me for some time, I thought he was insane, and I'd file for a divorce on the ground that he constantly made me suffer indignity."

I was conscious that my mouth had drooped open as she was speaking. "And Cushman believed that fantastic yarn?" I asked in amazement.

"Why not? He knew I've wanted a divorce for some time and would jump at any grounds for one. It was the divorce idea that sold him. He wants me to marry him. I don't think he'd have agreed to take Lawrence's place on the plane if I hadn't included that, because he was scared silly." She added reflectively. "Then too, Harry isn't very bright. He's got so much money, he's never had to do any thinking."

He must not be bright, I thought. But it was just as well for our chances that he wasn't. Having taken that plane to New York under Lawrence Powers's name, he was an accessory to murder clear up to his neck, because he'd never be able to convince the police he didn't know Powers was dead at the time. It occurred to me that pointing that fact out to him when we got back to St. Louis ought to silence any urge he might ever develop to tell his story.

Then it also occurred to me that Helena Powers had a remarkable talent for placing her aides in posi-

tions where they had to protect her in order to protect themselves. For she had me in the identical position she had Harry Cushman. We all three had to hang together, or hang separately.

Helena broke into my thoughts by inquiring, "How do you plan to get rid of Lawrence?"

Glancing at my watch, I saw it was seven P.M. "I don't tonight. He'll keep in his icebox another day. But we've got some scouting to do. Better put on a jacket, because it may be chilly along the lake."

I drove the car on our scouting trip. Our tourist court was not far from Berwyn Summit, and I cut straight east to the University of Chicago. Then I turned south along Lake Michigan until we began to run into beach areas.

At eight-thirty Helena said, "Shouldn't we be thinking about dinner soon?"

"No," I said shortly. Ever since I'd lifted that burlap bag I hadn't been able to think of anything but the iced corpse beneath it, and the thought didn't induce much appetite.

I drove as slowly as the traffic would let me, checking signs on the left side of the road. Finally, about nine o'clock, I spotted one which looked promising. It was on a wooden arch over an unpaved road and read: "Crestwood Beach, Private Road."

We were past it before I spotted it, however. I had to drive on an-

other mile before I could turn around.

Crestwood Beach proved as promising as it had looked. The beach itself was but a narrow strip of sand, and clustered along its edge were some two dozen modest summer cottages. I noted with satisfaction lights showed in not more than a half dozen.

Parking next to one of the dark cottages, I examined it carefully before getting out of the car. Apparently its owner's summer vacation had not started yet, for the windows were still boarded up. The cottages either side of it, each a good fifty yards away, were dark also.

I climbed out of the car and told Helena to get out also.

Together we walked the scant fifty feet down to the water. As I had hoped, each of the cottages had its own small boat dock. Nothing much, merely a series of planks laid across embedded steel rods, but adequate for an outboard boat.

"Think you can find this same place alone tomorrow night?" I asked Helena.

"If I have to."

I pointed out over the calm, moonlit water. "I'll be out there somewhere in an outboard. I won't be able to tell one beach from another in the dark, so you're going to have to signal me with the car lights. We'll set a time for the first signal, and you blink them twice. Just on and off fast, because we don't want any of the other cot-

tagers out here to come investigating. Then regularly every five minutes blink them again. Got it?"

"Yes."

We went back to the car and I drove back under the wooden arch to the main road again. A mile and a half northwest of Crestwood Beach I stopped once more, this time at a sign which read: "Boats for rent." This sign too was at the entrance to an unpaved road. I followed the road only about fifty yards before coming to the boat livery.

The proprietor was a grizzled old man in his seventies who chewed tobacco. He sat on the screened porch of a small cottage reading a Bible by the light of a Coleman gasoline lantern.

"They're all taken tonight, mister," he said as soon as I put my feet on the steps. He shot a stream of tobacco juice at a cuspidor halfway across the porch. "Everybody heard the large-mouths is biting."

Then he let out a cackle. "Don't know who starts them rumors. Look at that lake. Calm as glass. They'll come in with a mess of six-inch perch." He spat again.

"You booked up for tomorrow night?" I asked through the screen-door.

"Nope." He got up and opened the door for me.

Walking onto the porch, I said, "Then I'd like to reserve a boat. When's best to go out?"

"Ain't much point till it gets dark. If you mean to use live bait,

that is. Eight-thirty, nine o'clock."

I told him I'd be there at nine and paid in advance. The price of a boat and a fifteen-horsepower motor was six dollars, a Coleman lantern fifty cents extra, and I gave him a dollar for a can of night crawlers.

When I got back to the car, Helena asked, "May we eat now?"

I stopped at a roadside eatery and let her have some dinner while I drank two cups of coffee. I hadn't eaten since noon, but I still couldn't develop any appetite.

13.

By ten the next morning we were downtown at the largest branch of Sears Roebuck. Why criminals ever buy their necessary equipment anywhere else, I can't imagine. Police records are full of cases where kidnapers were trapped because the paper of the ransom note was traced to some exclusive stationery shop, or murderers were caught because a hammer was traced to some neighborhood hardware store where every customer is remembered. At a place like Sears you are only one of thousands of faces seen by the clerk waiting on you, and even if by some unlikely chance the item you buy is traced back to that particular clerk, the chance of his remembering anything at all about the person who bought it is remote. The chance of it's being traced that far is even more remote, since identical items are sold across Sears counters all over the country every day.

In the men's clothing department I bought the cheapest fishing jacket I could find.

In the sporting department I bought a cheap glass casting rod, a three-dollar-and-ninety-five-cent metal and plastic reel, fifty yards of nylon line, a cheap bait box and an assortment of leaders, sinkers, hooks and lures to fill up the bait box. I didn't intend to use any of it, but it might have excited comment at the boat livery if I had showed up to go fishing without any gear.

I also bought two eight-pound rowboat anchors. I intended to use them.

In the hardware department I bought fifty feet of sash cord. Also to use.

I stowed all of my purchases in the trunk of the convertible.

The rest of the day we simply waited.

At seven thirty in the evening we started the job of disposing of Lawrence Powers's body. First I transferred my fishing gear, the anchors and the sash cord from the car trunk to the rear seat of the car. The fishing jacket I put on. Then I carefully covered the floor of the trunk with the three burlap bags.

We hadn't added any ice to the tub since Helena showed me the body, and it had melted away to no more than about twenty-five pounds. I managed to lift the dead man out without spilling ice all over the floor.

The body was stiffened in its

prenatal position, the ice apparently having caused it to retain rigor mortis longer than it normally would have. I made no attempt to straighten it out because I would only have had to fold the knees up to the chest again in order to get it into the trunk.

There was little danger of anyone seeing me carry it the one or two steps from the car port door to the trunk, inasmuch as the car itself blocked the view from outside, but I had Helena stand in front of the stall anyway as a lookout.

The body was cold and slippery against my arms and chest as I staggered through the door with it and shoved it into the trunk. When I locked the trunk, I found I was drenched with sweat.

I let Helena drive. It was just nine o'clock when we pulled up across the road from the boat livery. I had Helena co-ordinate her watch with mine.

"I'll give you a half hour," I said. "Blink your lights exactly at nine thirty, and then again every five minutes after that until I dock. O.K.?"

"I understand," she said.

Collecting my fishing gear from the back seat, but leaving the anchors and sash cord, I got out of the car. Helena drove off without a word.

The boat the old man gave me was a flat-bottomed scow about ten feet long. In addition to the motor it contained a pair of oars and a gas

can with an extra gallon of gas. The Coleman lantern he furnished had a bolt welded to its bottom which fitted into one of the oarlocks.

I had to wait while he picked two dozen night crawlers from a large box of moss. I didn't have a use in the world for them, but it would have looked peculiar to go fishing without bait.

When I was settled in the boat, the old man said, "Looks like a good night for bass."

I looked out over the water, which was as smooth and moonlit as it had been the previous night.

"Yeah," I said sarcastically. "Just a little choppy."

He let out a cackle. "Them little six-inch perch is good eating anyway, even if they ain't much sport. You ought to catch a bushel."

I started the motor and pulled away while he was still cackling at his own humor.

14.

For about a quarter mile I set a course straight out from shore, then swung right and followed the shoreline for what I judged to be about a mile. The water was dotted with lights of other night fishermen, some farther out and some between me and the shore.

At twenty-five minutes past nine I picked a spot several hundred yards from the nearest fisherman's light, cut the motor and let the boat drift. There was a slight inshore current, but I figured I would main-

tain the same relative position to the other boats because I assumed they would take advantage of the current for drift trolling instead of anchoring and doing still fishing.

At nine twenty-nine by my watch I began studying the shoreline, concentrating on the point I judged Crestwood Beach would be. Minutes passed and nothing happened.

With my eyes straining at the shoreline, dotted here and there by cottage lights and silhouetted by the lights of moving traffic on the highway beyond it, I sat motionless for minutes more. Finally I risked lowering my gaze long enough to glance at the time, and was shocked to see it was twenty minutes to ten. By then Helena should have flashed her lights three times.

Just as I raised my eyes again, a pair of headlights blinked twice off to my right, a good quarter mile from where I had been searching for them. I only caught them from the corner of my eye, and they blinked on and off too fast for me to take a fix. There was nothing to do but wait another five minutes with my gaze centered in that direction.

Eventually they blinked twice again.

Starting the motor, I headed at full throttle toward the point where I had seen the lights. But running a boat in the dark is confusing. I was fifty yards offshore, had turned out my Coleman lantern and was heading confidently toward a narrow dock I could see protruding out over

the water when the lights blinked again a hundred yards to my left.

Changing course, I cut the throttle way down and slowly chugged up to the small dock Helena and I had stood on the night before. As I tied up I could make out the dim shadow of the convertible next to the dark and boarded-up cottage.

Helena greeted me with a calm, "Hello, Barney."

"Any trouble?" I asked.

"Not since I got here. I missed the turn and was a few minutes late. But no one from the other cottages has come out to ask why I was blinking my lights."

Looking in both directions, I could see no one. The cottages both sides of us were still dark. Going behind the car, I lifted the trunk lid and took the dead body of Lawrence Powers in my arms.

As I lurched past the front seat with my burden, I said, "Bring the gunny sacks."

I'm a fairly strong man, but it's quite a chore even for a strong man to carry an inanimate hundred and forty pounds over uneven ground in the dark. Once I stumbled and nearly dropped the body, and as I started to lower it into the boat, it slipped from my grip and nearly tumbled into the water before bouncing off the gunwale and settling just where I wanted it on the bottom of the boat.

Again I found myself drenched with sweat.

When I finished wiping my face

with a handkerchief, I found Helena standing on the dock beside me, the three burlap bags in her hands. Carefully I covered her husband's body with them.

Then I returned to the car for the two anchors and the sash cord.

When I was finally reseated in the boat and ready to start, Helena still stood on the dock.

"Can't I go along and help?" she asked.

"I'd never find this place again in the dark," I told her. I looked at my watch, noting it was five of ten. "Pick me up at the boat livery at ten thirty."

When she didn't say anything, I glanced up at her. Maybe it was only an effect of the moonlight, but I imagined there was a look of disappointment on her usually expressionless face, as though I had refused her some pleasure she particularly wanted to enjoy.

"Ten thirty," I repeated.

She merely nodded, and I started the motor and pulled away.

I headed straight out from shore at quarter speed for about fifty yards, then stopped long enough to light my lantern. I didn't care to have the Naval Reserve pick me up for running without lights.

When I started up again, I opened to full throttle and held it until I was even with the farthest boats from shore, approximately two miles out. I didn't want to risk calling attention to myself by going out beyond them.

There weren't many boats out that far, perhaps a half dozen spaced several hundred yards apart. I cut my motor halfway between two.

There was no risk working under the bright glare of the Coleman lantern, for since I could see nothing of the other boats except their lights, I knew it was impossible for them to see what was going on in mine. Working rapidly, I uncovered the body, cut a length of sash cord and tied one of the anchors around Lawrence Powers's neck. The other I tied firmly to his feet after lashing his ankles together.

I was standing up in the boat and just getting ready to heave him over the side when a voice said almost in my ear, "Any luck?"

Starting violently, I lost my balance, made a wild grab for the side of the boat and sat down with a thump on the body. I took one wild look over my shoulder, expecting to see someone within feet of me, then drew a deep sigh of relief. There was a boat light slowly coming toward me, but it was still a good twenty yards away. I realized it was only the acoustic effect of sound traveling across water which had made the voice seem so near.

Since the two figures in the other boat were only faceless shapes to me, I realized they couldn't see into my boat any clearer than I could see into theirs. Quickly I pulled the burlap sacks over the body and pushed myself up onto the rear seat next to the motor.

Only then did it occur to me I hadn't even answered the other boat's hail. Belatedly I called back in as calm a voice as I could muster, "Couple of small perch is all."

The boat was now within ten yards, and I could make out the two men in it. The one in front was in his early twenties and the man operating the motor was middle-aged. The motor was barely turning over, which was the reason I hadn't heard their approach. But they hadn't been trying to sneak up on me, I realized when I saw a line stretching back from either side of the boat. They were moving at that slow speed because they were trolling.

They passed within three yards of me. As they went by, the middle-aged man said, "We ain't having any luck either. We're about ready to go in."

Then they were past. Neither had glanced at the burlap-covered mound in the bottom of my boat.

I waited until I could see nothing of them but their light, then uncovered the body again, lifted it in my arms and heaved it into the water. It landed on its back, the sightless eyes peering straight up at me for a final second before it disappeared in a gurgle of bubbles.

I tossed the burlap bags overboard after it. Then, with shaking fingers, I lit a cigarette and drew a deep and relieved drag.

15.

I was halfway back to shore before

it occurred to me the old man at the boat livery might think it odd if he noticed my line wasn't wet. Cutting the motor, I tied a yellow and red flatfish to my line and made a long cast out over the water. I knew the chance of getting a strike on an artificial lure at night was remote, but all I was interested in was getting the line wet.

My usual fisherman's luck held. If I had been fishing seriously, I could have sat there all night without a single strike. But because the last thing in the world I wanted at that moment was a fish, I nailed a northern pike which must have weighed close to five pounds. It took me nearly ten minutes to land it.

Then I had another thought. I didn't have an Illinois fishing license. And it would be just my luck to step out of the boat into the arms of a game warden.

So I unhooked one of the nicest northerns I ever boated and tossed it back in the water.

When I pulled in at the boat livery dock, the old man asked me, "Any luck?"

"A five pound northern," I said. "But I tossed it back in."

He cackled. I knew he wouldn't believe me.

Helena had parked the car just off the highway on the dirt road leading down to the boat livery. She was sitting on the right side of the seat, so after tossing my fishing gear in the back, I slid under the wheel.

"Everything go all right?"

"O.K. I even caught a fish on the way in."

"Oh? Do you like fishing?"

"Under ordinary circumstances,"

I said. "It's my favorite sport."

"Then why didn't you stay out a while?" she asked seriously. "I wouldn't have minded waiting."

The question solidified an opinion I had already formed. Beneath her beautiful exterior Helena was almost psychotically callous. The casual way in which she had borrowed ice for our drinks from the tub containing the corpse of her husband had convinced me of that. Her suggestion that I might have enjoyed a little fishing immediately after dumping the same corpse in Lake Michigan only confirmed my judgment.

I didn't try to explain it to her. I just said, "I wasn't particularly in the mood for fishing tonight."

Back at the tourist court we had one more job. I set Helena to work scrubbing out the tub which had been her husband's bier for five days.

Then I informed her there wasn't any reason, now that her cabin was corpseless, that she couldn't sleep in her own bed that night. She gave me a mildly surprised look, but she made no objection.

I didn't think it necessary to explain that musing on her homicidal tendencies had begun to give me the feeling it might not be too safe to go to sleep in the same room she was in.

I locked my cabin door that night.

My last thought before going to sleep was speculation as to what Helena's feelings would be when she stepped into that tub for a shower the next morning. Then I stopped speculating, because I knew it wouldn't bother her in the slightest.

16.

The trip back to St. Louis on Sunday was uneventful. En route I briefed Helena again on how she must behave on Monday in order to keep suspicion from herself. I elaborated a little on my original instructions and made her repeat them back to me.

"I'm to meet the plane Lawrence intended to come back on just as though I expected him to be on it," she said tonelessly. "After it lands and everyone is off, I'm to check with the flight office and pretend to be upset because he wasn't listed on the flight. Then I'm to wire Lawrence in care of convention headquarters in New York. When word comes back that the telegram isn't deliverable, I'm to wire an inquiry to convention headquarters itself." She paused, then asked, "But will anybody be there if the convention is over?"

"Conventions are always headed up by local people in the town where the convention's held," I told her. "Usual procedure is for the chairman to rent a temporary post office box under the convention's name, then inform Western Union wires addressed to convention head-

quarters are to be delivered either to his office or home. He'll have the same office and home after the convention."

"I see. Well, when the wire comes back from convention headquarters saying Lawrence never reported in, I'm to phone the police and report him missing."

"You've got it pretty well," I said, satisfied that she could carry it off. "There's only one more thing. You've got to get it across to Harry Cushman that if he mentions his part in this, he's an accessory to first-degree murder. He's going to have to know Lawrence is dead, because otherwise he may get rattled enough at his continued disappearance to take his story to the police. Don't give him any details. Just give it to him cold that Lawrence is dead and he'd better keep his mouth shut if he wants to stay out of jail. Also tell him to stay completely away from you for the present. I don't want the cops accidentally stumbling over him, because while I'm sure he'll keep his mouth shut if he's left alone, I think he'd break pretty easily under questioning. If he keeps away from you, there isn't any reason for the cops to find out you even know him."

"I understand," she said. "I can handle Harry."

We took MacArthur Bridge back into St. Louis. I drove straight to my flat, then turned the car over to Helena. I didn't invite her in.

Standing on the sidewalk with my

bag in one hand and my new fishing gear in the other, I said, "I've kept a list of expenses. But I'll wait until the police lose interest in your husband and you get your affairs straightened out before I bill you. I imagine your money will be tied up for some time if everything was in Lawrence's name."

"Are you adding an additional fee for disposing of Lawrence?" she asked.

"That was on the house. Just don't give me any more little jobs like that."

"Will I see you again, Barney? I mean aside from when you submit your expense account."

I shook my head definitely. "You're a lovely woman, and except for the third party you rang in on our trip, I enjoyed the week thoroughly. But this is the end. When things quiet down, you divorce Lawrence for desertion and marry some nice millionaire. Harry Cushman, maybe, if he isn't too scared to come near you again."

I thought for a moment her expressionless face looked a little wistful, but it may have been imagination. Her voice was as totally lacking in emotion as usual when she spoke.

"Good-by, Barney."

"Good-by, Helena," I said.

She drove away.

17.

I had hoped that was the end of it, but at nine Monday evening Helena phoned me at home.

"Everything went smoothly, Barney," she announced the moment I picked up the phone. "It worked out just as you said. The police were just here for a picture of Lawrence to teletype to New York. They weren't in the least suspicious, and about all they asked me was if he'd said anything about financial troubles recently."

Her call upset me. "Listen," I said. "Did it occur to you your phone might be tapped?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she asked, "Could it be?"

"No," I snapped. "They wouldn't tap a phone on a routine missing person case. *But don't call me again.* It's an unnecessary risk."

"I'm sorry, Barney. I thought you'd want to know."

"Just let me know if something goes wrong," I said. "If I don't hear from you, I'll assume you're doing fine."

But she phoned me again at nine Tuesday night.

As soon as I recognized her voice, I said bitterly, "I told you not to phone!"

"You said I should if something went wrong. Well, something has."

I felt a cold chill run along my spine. "What?"

"You'll have to come out here, Barney. Right away."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you over the phone. But you *must* come. Immediately."

"As soon as I can get a taxi," I said, and hung up.

All the way out to Helena's home in the cab I wondered what possibly could have gone wrong. There wasn't anything that *could* have gone wrong, I kept assuring myself. If ever a perfect murder had been pulled, Lawrence Powers's was it. Not only was the body beyond recovery, the police didn't even suspect there had been a murder, and probably never would.

The only thing I could think of was that Harry Cushman had gone to the police. But that seemed inconceivable to me. If I had evaluated him right, he'd stay as far away from both the police and Helena as he could get from the minute he realized he could be charged as an accessory to first-degree homicide.

My thoughts hadn't accomplished anything but to get me all upset by the time we arrived at Helena's home.

Helena met me at the front door. She wore a red, off-the-shoulder hostess gown, and she looked as calm and unruffled as ever.

"Alice isn't here," she greeted me. "I sent her home at six because I expected Harry at seven."

So it was Harry Cushman after all who was causing whatever the trouble was, I thought.

I asked, "He still here?"

Instead of answering, she led me into the front room. "Would you like a drink before we talk?"

"No, I wouldn't like a drink before we talk," I said, exasperated. "Just tell me what's wrong."

"I'd rather show you."

The words raised the hair at the base of my neck. The last time she'd used similar words, she led me to her husband's iced corpse. Now she took my hand, just as she had that previous time, and led me into the dining room. I followed numbly, almost knowing what to expect.

The light was off in the dining room, but the switch was by the door and Helena flicked it on as we entered. Then she dropped my hand and looked at me expectantly.

The dining room was large and had a fireplace on the outside wall. Against the wall closest to us was a sideboard containing a tray of bottles and glasses and a bowl of ice cubes.

Lying face down in front of the sideboard was Harry Cushman, the entire back of his head a pulpy and bloody mass from some terrific blow. His left hand clutched a glass from which the liquid had spilled, and near his outstretched right hand lay a siphon bottle on its side. Next to him lay a pair of brass fire tongs with blood on them.

The shock was not as great as you might expect, because I had anticipated something on this order from the moment Helena said she would rather "show" me. Glancing about the room, I saw the drapes were drawn so that we were safe from outside observation.

I said coldly, "It looks like you hit him from behind while he was mixing a drink. Right?"

She merely nodded.

"Why?"

"Because I was afraid he might give us away. He was in a panic when I told him Lawrence was dead."

"Did he threaten to go to the police?"

She shook her head.

"What *did* he say?"

Helena shrugged slightly. "Nothing, really, except that I hadn't any right to involve him in murder. It was the way he acted. He shook like a leaf."

For a long time I looked at her. "Let me get this straight," I said finally. "He didn't threaten to expose us. He wasn't going to the police. But just because he seemed to you like a bad security risk, you murdered him."

She frowned slightly. "You make it sound worse than it was."

"Then make it sound better."

She made an impatient gesture. "What difference does it make now? It's done. And we have to dispose of the body."

Again she looked at me expectantly, a curious brightness in her eyes. And suddenly I realized something I had been aware of subconsciously for some time, but hadn't brought to the front of my mind for examination.

Helena enjoyed watching me solve the problems brought on by murder.

It was a game to her, I knew with abrupt understanding, for the first

time really knowing what went on under that expressionless face.

I said, "What do you mean, *we* have to dispose of the body? I haven't killed anybody."

Her lip corners curved upward in a barely discernible smile. "I'm sure you wouldn't want me caught, Barney. You can only be executed for one murder. So there wouldn't be any point in not telling the police about Lawrence if I got caught for this one. Including how cleverly you got rid of the body."

With a feeling of horror I looked off into the future, seeing myself disposing of corpse after corpse as Helena repeatedly indulged her newly discovered thrill.

With only one result. Nobody gets away with murder forever.

I knew what I had to do then.

For a moment I examined her moodily. Then I shrugged. "All right, Helena. We may as well start now. Get some rags."

Obediently she went into the kitchen, returning in a few moments with several large rags. Taking one from her, I picked up the tongs.

"Lift his head a little," I said. "So I can spread a rag under it."

Turning her back to me, she put both hands under the dead man's shoulders and tugged upward. I swung the brass fire tongs down on top of her head with all my force.

It isn't much harder to dispose of two bodies than it is to dispose of one. Not with a river as deep as the Mississippi so close by.

No Half Cure

The doctor felt very happy — and the fact that he'd cured Mrs. Clinton didn't account for all of his happiness . . .

**BY ROBERT
E. MURRAY**

FOR one of the few times since he had become an analyst, Doctor Kleist felt something very close to euphoria. He smiled at the woman across the desk from him, savoring this moment. It was one of the good times. It was times like these that kept a man from going back to the more profitable field of surgery. A complete recovery like this one made a grim profession worth while.

"You're certain, Doctor?" the woman asked, and there was an almost breathless pleasure in her voice.

Doctor Kleist laughed. "Yes, Mrs. Clinton, I'm quite certain."

"And there'll be no — recurrence?"

"No. Kleptomania has been one of my specialties for a number of years, Mrs. Clinton. I feel, in all modesty, that I know more about it than almost any other analyst



to whom you might have come." He paused. "I've never been more certain of a complete recovery. And, Mrs. Clinton—I've never been made happier by one."

It was true, he reflected. He'd grown quite fond of Mrs. Clinton, and of her husband, and he'd always remember them warmly. Her husband had brought her to this office ten months ago, a lovely, cultured woman in her early thirties, a woman wealthy in her own right and married to one of the city's most successful corporation lawyers—and the thief of worthless baubles from dime stores and bargain counters. On the day before her husband had brought her here, Mrs. Clinton had been arrested for stealing a thirty-nine-cent compact. The magistrate had released her in her husband's custody and recommended Doctor Kleist.

"I'll be forever grateful," Mrs. Clinton said. "You don't know how much —"

"But I do," Doctor Kleist said. "I do indeed. I think it's been a very rewarding experience for all of us."

"I'm afraid I was pretty difficult to get along with, Doctor."

He smiled. "Extremely."

"And uncooperative."

"That, too."

She laughed softly and stood up. "I can scarcely wait to tell Walt. The poor darling, sometimes I think he's endured even more with me than you have."

"Husbands often do," Doctor Kleist said. "Especially someone like Walt. But that's a thing of the past now. In a case like this, an analyst likes to feel he's been responsible for not just one, but two recoveries. It's a very pleasant feeling, I assure you." He came around the desk and walked with her to the door.

"It's almost like being . . . well, reborn," Mrs. Clinton said.

He nodded. "This will be the last time, of course," he said. "The last time you'll *have* to come here. But I hope you'll drop in now and then. And bring Walt with you, if you can. I like to admire my handiwork."

For a long moment after they had said goodbye, Doctor Kleist stood quite motionless before the door, listening to the sound of Mrs. Clinton's high heels fading away in the direction of the elevator. Then he turned and walked slowly back to his desk and sat down in the deep leather chair.

A wonderful woman, he thought, a truly wonderful woman. He envied her husband. A fine man, that Walt Clinton. He leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes, fantasizing the way it would be with Walt at the moment his wife told him their mutual nightmare was over.

Then, humming softly to himself, he drew a ruled yellow pad from a drawer and began the draft of a paper he wanted to read at the next congress of the Association for the

Advancement of Psychoanalysis. He had, in Mrs. Clinton's case, gained new insight into certain facets of kleptomania, and he was anxious to share them with his colleagues.

He had been working steadily for over an hour when the phone rang.

He lifted the phone absently, still writing rapidly. "Doctor Kleist."

"Hello, Doctor. This is Walt Clinton."

Doctor Kleist smiled and put down his pencil. "Well, Walt. How are you?" Walt, he was sure, had just received the good news and was calling to add his thanks to those of his wife.

"Doctor, is my wife still there at your office?"

"Why, no, Walt." He glanced at his watch. "She left better than an hour ago."

"Oh. Well, I just wondered. She said she intended to come straight home. We had an engagement, and . . . well, never mind, Doctor. She probably forgot. Maybe she stopped off to do a little shopping." He laughed, a little thinly. "You know how women are."

"I know," Doctor Kleist said. "She'll be along soon, Walt."

"Sure. Well, I'm sorry I bothered you for nothing, Doctor."

"No bother at all," Doctor Kleist said. For a moment he debated hinting to Walt that there was a bit of wonderful news coming his way, but decided against it. That should be Mrs. Clinton's show.

He had scarcely replaced the

phone in its cradle when it rang again.

It was Mrs. Clinton. "Something ridiculous has happened, Doctor Kleist . . ."

"Really? What's that?"

"Well, I went several places before I came to your office this afternoon. I've just finished revisiting the last of them, and — this is really ridiculous — I thought I'd better call and — well, the thing is that I've lost my cigarette case somewhere. I didn't use it while I was in your office, and I don't think there's much chance it could have fallen from my purse, but . . ."

"I'm sorry," Doctor Kleist said. "It isn't here, Mrs. Clinton. You say you've gone back to the other places you visited?"

"Yes. I just can't imagine . . . It's one Walt gave me on our anniversary, and that's why it's so important."

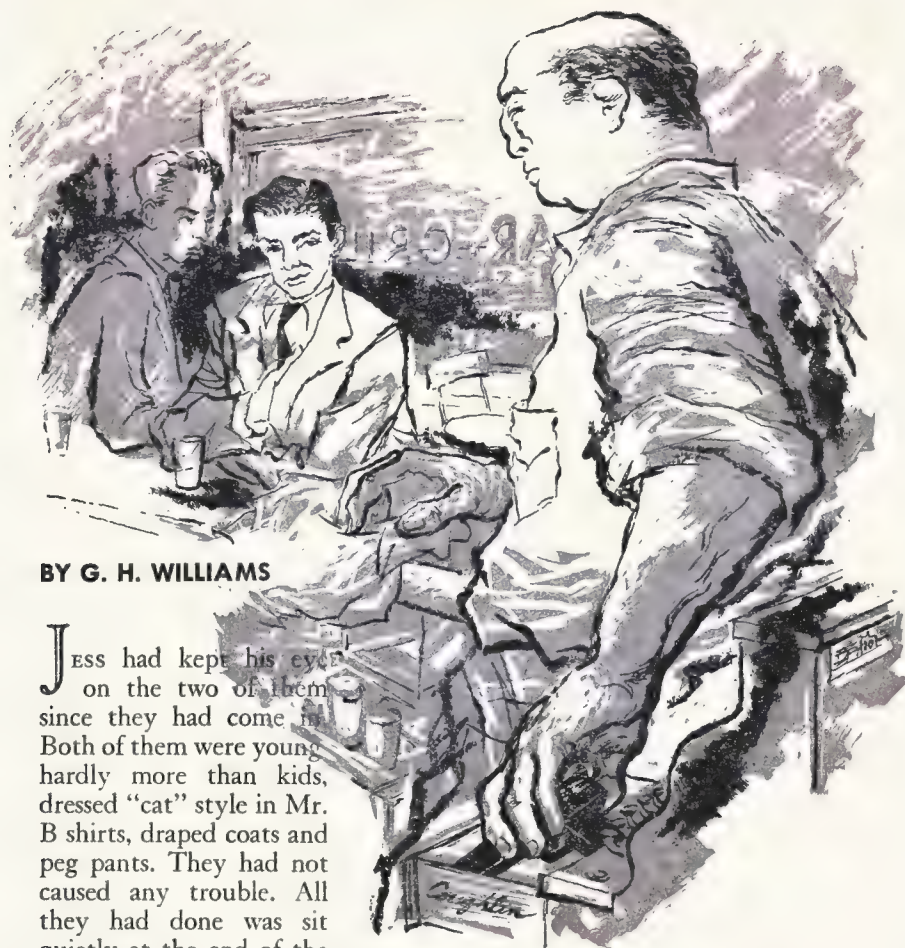
"There's only one thing important today, Mrs. Clinton," he said. "And that's the news you have for Walt."

She was silent a moment. "Yes. Yes, I guess you're right. It is silly to let such a small thing . . ."

"Of course it is."

He said goodbye, put the phone down very gently, and then reached into his inside jacket pocket for the thin platinum case.

It was a shame he didn't smoke, he reflected. But still, it would give him so much satisfaction, knowing it was there in his desk drawer with all the others.



BY G. H. WILLIAMS

Jess had kept his eyes on the two of them since they had come in. Both of them were young, hardly more than kids, dressed "cat" style in Mr. B shirts, draped coats and peg pants. They had not caused any trouble. All they had done was sit quietly at the end of the bar drinking beer.

Still Jess did not like their looks. Hoods he could handle because he always knew what they were thinking. Kids were different. They were always surprising you. You couldn't trust any of them.

Judgment

In twenty years he'd never had to use the gun. Now it looked as if he might have to break his record . . .

Standing behind the bar he watched the place slowly empty. The two of them did not move.

Jess was not afraid. He had owned the bar for twenty years and had yet to use the forty-five that rested on a shelf beneath the register. Occasionally he would have a troublesome drunk but very seldom. Usually the drunk would take one look at the scar tissue around Jess' eyes, his flattened nose, and cauliflower ear, then decide to move on.

Finally the kids were the last customers left. Slowly, dabbing at glass rings on the bar with a rag, Jess moved down toward them. "I'm sorry, fellows," he said, "I'm closing up. You're going to have to come back another time. Sorry." He grinned, showing his two gold teeth.

They only stared at him and drank their beer.

Little punks, he thought. Trying to act smart. They're all alike. They're what's wrong with the world. Punks.

"It's after curfew, so I can't serve you, anyway. So would you mind finishing up and moving along?" Jess was still grinning. "Come back any time between five and midnight. I'll be glad to have you."

One kid turned to the other. "Did you hear the man say something, Phil?"

"No. I sure didn't. Maybe he just coughed."

"Yeah. That must have been it."

"He's real clever," the one called Phil said.

If it had not been for the hardness in their eyes Jess would have laughed at them. They were talking like a couple of movie tough guys. "I'm going to have to ask you to move on," Jess said again.

"I don't think he wants us here, Phil. He's trying to get us to beat it."

"That makes me feel lousy, when somebody tells me to leave a place." Phil sipped his beer. "I hate for people not to like me. It makes me feel lousy. Know what I mean?"

Jess wanted to tell them to act their age but instead he said, "Look, I know how it is when you've had a couple too many. Go on home and sleep it off. No hard feelings."

"That's damn white of you," Phil said. "It makes me feel good all over. There's only one thing that would make me feel better." Phil grinned and took a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket. "You know what that is?" He lit a cigarette and blew a stream of smoke through his nose. "Well, it would be for you to open that register and give us a little going-away present. That would make us feel real good."

All the time the boy had been speaking the two of them had not taken their eyes from Jess. He was beginning to sweat. He felt it trickle down his back and knew his shirt was turning dark beneath the arms.

"All right," Jess said, making his voice hard, "you guys had better cut it out now and beat it. Go on now and I won't remember what

you look like. If you don't, I'll see that you spend a little time on the roads. If you don't believe me, just keep up the way you're going."

"You're real tough, aren't you?"

"Tough enough to handle two punks like you."

Phil put his hand inside his coat and let it stay. "If I have to take my hand out you know what's going to happen, don't you?"

"You're making a big mistake," Jess said.

"Yeah. I'm going to lose all kinds of sleep over it."

"Cut out the stalling," Phil said. "Open the register."

Jess watched the two of them as he edged toward the register. "You kids had better think this over."

"Come on."

As Jess reached the register he laid his hand on the butt of the forty-five resting on its shelf. It felt cold and heavy in his hand as he turned and fired.

He had hurried his first shot a bit and it was wild, smashing the neon clock above the men's room. But the next two shots were not wild. The kid beside Phil was hurled from his stool to the floor beside one of the booths.

It was not like the movies. He didn't wobble or groan. One moment he was sitting on the stool, the next he was laying on his back beside one of the booths.

Phil had dropped down beside his stool, sobbing, "Don't shoot. Don't shoot. I don't have any rod.

For God's sake, we were only kidding. Don't shoot."

Jess walked around the bar and stood looking down at him. He was crouched beside the stool, unable to keep his eyes from the body beside the booths.

"Get up," Jess said.

Phil stood, muttering, "You didn't have to level on us. Why the hell did you do it?"

Jess lowered the gun. "Don't try nothing, punk. Just stand easy." He went to the pay phone and put in a call to the police. All the time he was talking he did not take his eyes from the kid.

When he came back the kid had stopped sobbing. "Look, mister," he pleaded. "You got to let me go. I never done nothing like this before. Honest to God. It will kill my folks."

Jess looked at him. Punk kids, he thought, are what's wrong with the world now. He'll get a couple of years in the reformatory and be back out to bother innocent people.

"All right, kid," Jess smiled. "Beat it."

"You mean it?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

The kid stood in the doorway without moving, watching him coldly. Jess said: "What are you waiting for? I'm not going to tell the police anything about you."

"You're damn right you're not," the kid said thinly.

Jess never felt the bullet that smashed into his brain.

MUGGED AND PRINTED

CHARLES JACKSON, world-famous author of *The Lost Weekend*, returns to *Manhunt* this month with the perceptive and unusual *A Bachelor In The Making*.



Jackson, who now lives in New Hampshire with his wife and two daughters, has had a varied list of occupations: he's been a bookstore clerk, a country-newspaper editor and a summer theatre stage manager, among other things.

He's lived all over the world and many varied backgrounds find their way into his work, which includes two other novels and two volumes of short stories.

RICHARD DEMING's brand new novel, *Hit And Run*, appears this month in *Manhunt* — a fitting milestone for an author whose work has been increasingly popular with our readers since *Manhunt's* inception two years ago. Deming is well-known as the creator of Manville Moon, who has appeared in *Manhunt* short stories as well as in the Rinehart novels *The Gallops In My Garden*, *Tweak The Devil's Nose* and the forthcoming *Whistle Past The Graveyard*. Deming lives in upstate New York and is now at work on some new stories for *Manhunt* as well as a new novel.



JONATHAN CRAIG returns this month with his newest documentary, *The Red Tears*. Craig, a former night-club pianist turned author, gets his information from actual police files, and his stories are always authentic and surprising. He's the author of the new Lion book, *Alley Girl*, which readers and reviewers throughout the country are praising, and he's now at work in his New York home on another book, as well as more short stories and novelettes for *Manhunt*.

FLOYD MAHANNAH will be remembered for his fine story, *Where's The Money?*, some months ago in *Manhunt*. He's also the author of *The Golden Goose*, *The Yellow Hearse* and the new *Stopover For Murder*. Mahannah lives in California with his wife, and is now doing some research on California history for a new book.



His newest story is called *The Hero*, and we think it's one of the finest he's ever done. Maybe the toughness and realism in Mahannah's prose comes from the fact that he used to be a truck-driver or maybe it's his research — but whatever causes it, it's certainly worth looking for, as we're sure you'll agree.

HAL ELLSON's *Pretty Boy* is another tough and realistic picture of teenage gang life by the author of *Duke* and *Tomboy*. You'll be seeing more Ellson stories soon ♦ FLETCHER FLORA's new book, *The Strange Sisters*, will soon be issued by Lion. In the meantime, here's another of his fine stories: *Two Little Hands*. ♦ ROBERT TURNER's *Tobacco Town Murders* has been getting rave nationwide reviews. *Manhunt* readers will remember him for many good stories — the current one, *A Life For A Life*, is one of the best he's done. ♦ MAX FRANKLIN is a new mystery writer who's risen to a top position with two novels: *Justice Has No Sword* and the new *Hell Street*. *Diary Of A Devout Man* marks his debut in *Manhunt*, and we're sure we'll be bringing you more by Franklin before long.

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